



HAIG



FIELD-MARSHAL EARL HAIG, VISCOUNT  
DAWICK AND BARON HAIG, AND 29TH  
LAIRD OF BEMERSYDE, O.M., K.T., G.C.B.,  
G.C.V.O., K.C.I.F.

# HAIG

by

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*Author of Talleyrand*

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TO  
THE MEMORY  
OF THE MEN WHO SERVED WITH HIM  
THIS BIOGRAPHY  
OF  
EARL HAIG OF BEMERSYDE  
IS DEDICATED  
AS HE WOULD HAVE WISHED



## PREFACE

**T**he executors of the late Lord Haig, who invited me to write this book, have placed at my disposal all the relevant documents in their possession. The most important of these is the diary that he kept throughout the war. The average entry for each day amounts to two or three typewritten foolscap pages. With it is incorporated a large number of other papers—letters, received and dispatched, official records of important meetings, telegrams, orders of the day, maps, etc. The copy which is housed in the office of the Committee of Imperial Defence is contained in thirty-six folio volumes.

The earlier diaries, with the exception of the Oxford one, contain merely the briefest record of events, with many and lengthy intervals of complete silence. They are supplemented, during the two campaigns in which he took part before the Great War, by regular letters to his sister, Mrs. Jameson.

I have had the advantage of reading a copy of a document, the original of which is deposited in the British Museum with instructions that it is not to be published until 1940. It consists of a summary of the more important events that took place while Lord Haig held the position of Commander-in-Chief. It was compiled by the General Staff, and reviewed and corrected by Lord Haig himself.

I am deeply indebted to many relatives, friends and brother officers of the late Field Marshal for the assistance that they have given me. If I were to mention their names the list would be too long, but I must express particular gratitude to Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds, the Official Historian, who has not only read the proofs but

## PREFACE

has helped me with his advice and unrivalled knowledge of the Western Front.

For the convenience of the reader the biography will be published in two volumes, but the life of Lord Haig cannot be divided into two parts. It is an epic drama of four years and one hundred days. There is also a preparatory prologue of fifty-three years and an epilogue of ten.

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## Chapter I

### OXFORD

On the 19th of June in the year 1861 Douglas Haig was born at 24 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, the last of a large family. Scotsmen take a greater interest in their forbears than do the English, and the Haigs can boast of genealogical trees with their roots in the dim ages. John Haig, however, the father of Douglas, was a distiller of whisky, and in the performance of that useful function he had acquired considerable wealth. Nevertheless he was accounted fortunate when he secured as his bride the beautiful Miss Veitch of Elrock, who was his junior by nineteen years. The Veitches belonged to that section of society who in the middle of the nineteenth century were still able to look down on the trading community, and they considered that they had conferred a favour on the Haigs by consigning a dowerless daughter to their care.

The marriage, despite the disparity of ages and the suggestion of misalliance, proved eminently successful. The young wife, with a devotion commoner, perhaps, in those days than in these, gave up her whole life to the care of her home, the duties of her religion and the welfare of her children. She took no part in society, either in Edinburgh or at her husband's country house in Fife. Every morning at four o'clock she would rise from her bed in order to visit the rooms where her children were sleeping, and the religious faith which she implanted in their minds remained

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with them when she was no longer there to remind them of it.

The family increased with almost mechanical regularity. The marriage took place in 1839, and during the twenty-two years that followed eleven children were born at intervals of two years between each. Nine survived; and the fact that the two who were born in 1853 and 1855 died young emphasised the gap between the six elder and the three younger children. Douglas's eldest brother was twenty years older, and his youngest sister was ten years older than himself. It was therefore natural that their relations towards him should be those rather of uncle and aunt than of brother and sister, and they showed themselves fully sensible of the responsibility that such circumstances imposed, especially after the deaths of their father and mother which occurred in 1878 and 1879.

Like Wellington before him, he was considered the dunce of the family, and like his contemporary Henry Wilson, who failed three times to pass into Sandhurst, Douglas Haig gave no precocious evidence of intellectual ability. He was first sent to a day school in Edinburgh and later to a preparatory school at Rugby, with a view to passing thence into the public school which Dr. Arnold had made famous. But he proved a backward scholar, it was feared that he would fail in the entrance examination, and he was eventually sent to Clifton College, where apparently at that time the standard of education expected of novices was less exacting.

He remained at Clifton for four years, from 1875 to 1879. He was a popular and handsome boy, but did not distinguish himself either at work or at athletics. He was a member of the School House, for which he eventually played both at cricket and at football, but he never played for the school.

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When he left school he was eighteen years of age, possessed of a fortune which assured him independence, and he was an orphan. The first use that he made of his liberty was to accompany one of his elder brothers, Hugo, on a visit to America. They travelled as far as California, and during the journey he decided that he would go to Oxford on his return. He accordingly became an undergraduate of Brasenose in the autumn of 1880.

His reception by the Principal of that College was reminiscent of an earlier Oxford that was rapidly passing, if it had not already passed, away. Dr. Cradock had held his position for twenty-seven years. To the young undergraduate at their first interview he exclaimed, "Ride, sir, ride—I like to see the gentlemen of Brasenose in top boots";—and to the future Lord Askwith<sup>1</sup>, who joined the College on the same day, he said, "Drink plenty of port, sir, you want port in this damp climate."

Haig was not slow to act upon the suggestion tendered to him by so high an authority. Although he spent much of his first year in rowing, and achieved considerable success on the river, he subsequently devoted all his leisure and most of his attention to riding, which he realised was an accomplishment likely to prove of greater value in his future career; and it was at Oxford that he acquired that skill in horsemanship which distinguished him for the rest of his life. It was here, also, that he learned to play polo, the only game at which he ever excelled.

But he learnt more at Oxford than to ride and to play polo. Many boys who have not risen to the highest places in their public schools, nor exercised that influence which is reserved for those who distinguish themselves at either of the two games that are there considered of importance,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Askwith furnished the information on which the two anecdotes about Dr. Cradock are based.

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suffer, when they come to the University, from a consciousness of inferiority, which may impair their development. They are fortunate, therefore, if they quickly appreciate the new scale of values that obtains in University life, where cricket and football are not the only games, nor athletics the only criterion of merit.

Haig, with his good looks, his experience of travel, his sufficiency of means and his fine horsemanship, soon became a person of some importance in a certain sphere. He was elected to the most fashionable clubs, the Vampyres, a Brasenose Sunday luncheon club, the Phoenix, Vincent's and the Bullingdon. He became an intimate friend of the most prominent, that is to say the wealthiest and the gayest, of the undergraduates.

It would not have been surprising if the young Scotsman had had his head turned by success so easily achieved. He was under no necessity of earning his living; he had to fear neither a father's frown nor a mother's reproaches; he was well equipped for appreciating the cup of pleasure that was offered to him, and it would be hard to blame him if he had drained it to the dregs. But in his veins there ran the blood of the Covenanters, and in his heart there remained the teachings of the Presbyterian religion which he had learnt at his mother's knee. And Oxford, which gave him a sense of his own importance; filled him also with the determination to do himself justice, and to succeed in the career that he had decided to adopt. "No dinner and no club", writes a contemporary,<sup>1</sup> "deterred Haig if he was not prepared for a particular lecture or essay. As to wine and cards, he was more than abstemious. His object was to pass his schools, and to pass them quickly, and he cut or left a social gathering for his books with singular tenacity of purpose."

<sup>1</sup> Lord Askwith.

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The same witness asserts that Haig informed him on the evening of his arrival at Brasenose that he intended to go into the Army. It appears somewhat curious that if he had formed this decision so early he should have thought it necessary to go to the University, instead of going straight to Sandhurst; and there are some who hold that he had seriously contemplated the Diplomatic Service as a career, in which his character, as it subsequently developed, makes it doubtful whether he would have achieved great distinction. But however this may be, there is no doubt that while he was at Oxford he drew up the plans for his future career and that, having done so, he never wavered in carrying them out.

It was during his last year at Oxford that he first kept a diary. It begins in January and ends in May, and there are many gaps in its continuity. But the virus had entered into his blood, and for the rest of his life, although with intermissions, he retained the diary-keeping habit.

In February 1883 he opens the volume as follows:

"Having oftentimes heard of the advantages to be derived from keeping a diary, I determine to keep one. The difficulty is to have a good day to begin upon. I think it as well to start from the 19th day of last June, upon which day I was twenty-one, and put down as many events as I can remember with accuracy which happened from this day."

Walter Pater was a Fellow of Brasenose at this period, and Haig used to assert that it was Pater who had taught him to write English. Yet there is little evidence, even in his third year, of the master's influence on his prose style.

Having stated his intention of beginning with the 19th of June, he goes straight on with the artless egoism of youth to write:

"*Saturday, 17 June 1882.* I played at Hurlingham at polo for Oxford University *v.* Cambridge. Our team consisted



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of 1. Harry Portman, Captain. 2. Jack Cator. 3. Gosling. 4. Charrington—and self.<sup>1</sup> Portman's two ponies inferior. Cator had only one. Gosling two, but he himself as well as ponies was moderate player—Charrington had two excellent ponies but being himself such a duffer he might as well have been off the ground! I had one very good pony and another moderately good one. I got the only goal on our side, but we ought to have had several had our fellows backed me up. The Cam. team only got one also, so the match was a draw.”

The reader may be pardoned for suspecting that had any other hand shot Oxford's solitary goal, the diary might have opened, as originally intended, two days later.

These were the early days of polo. It was still customary to play five a side. It was introduced to Oxford during Haig's residence, and when permission was requested from the Curators to play it in the Parks, the petitioners, Haig being their draughtsman, hoping that the historical touch might produce a favourable impression, boldly asserted that the game was of great antiquity and had been introduced into Europe by the explorer Marco Polo.

The diary is a cheerful chronicle of Oxford life from the point of view of one whose principal interests are hunting and polo, who enjoys the club life of the University and plays his part in club politics, but who is determined to combine with this easy-going existence that modicum of work which will enable him to satisfy the examiners.

Here are days typical of many others:

“*Sunday, January 21st.* I passed the morning drawing and reading in my rooms. I lunched in College with Popham. In the evening I dined at Barton's and Melville's at 4 Turl Street, where were also Lubbock and some others. At 8 o'clock, we went to Vincent's election. Owing to a caucus

<sup>1</sup> For further information regarding undergraduates mentioned see note at end of chapter.

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arranged by Adamson of Oriel we only got one of our men on the Committee. This Adamson is indeed a 'viper nourished in the bosom of Brasenose'. Having only got into the club last term thro' the instrumentality of B.N.C. he now does his best to trample on his friends."

"*February, Thursday, 15th.* I hunted with the Bicester and in the evening I dined at Vincent's with Lubbock. I met Stewart, Portal, Melville and two others. After dinner we went into Bromley-Davenport's rooms in Balliol where some sang: I played whist. I thought Portal rather a nice fellow: he asked me to lunch next Wednesday. I accepted tho' I never eat lunch."

"*Friday, 16th.* I passed the morning as usual, reading French in my rooms. At two I went to Bullingdon ground to break in my pony."

"*Sunday, 18th.* Rawson and I breakfasted alone about 10 o'clock. We were talking together about 1 when Marshall came in saying that he had been sent by the Bullingdon Club to ask me to go to the meeting in Sitwell's rooms in Keene's lodgings. I went and found about 14 members. Portman elected secretary Cator treasurer. I put up Lane; Chas. Trefusis kindly seconded him tho' he knew him not. He got in without one black ball. I put Barry's brother up but he got pilled. Ormsby-Gore got in also.

"We had a very good champagne lunch afterwards. I sat between Macpherson-Grant and Phusia. I had promised to lunch with Brassey in Balliol but could not go owing to the meeting. I went however about 2.30 and found Brassey and Collingwood finished. He did not mind when I told him he had been elected to Bullingdon."

He retained through life the habit of recording who sat upon either side of him at a meal, although his later diaries until the Great War hold less of human interest than this first one.

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This term was interrupted by a sudden visit to France occasioned by the health of his brother Hugo, who was staying at Pau. On arrival there he formed the opinion that his brother's illness was considerably exaggerated by his imagination, and the amplitude of the entries in the diary during the following few weeks points to a surplus of leisure inadequately filled. The invalid demanded continual change and the small family party, which consisted of Hugo's wife and first one and then another sister, moved restlessly from place to place in the neighbourhood of the Pyrenees.

Wherever they stopped the young undergraduate opened immediately two channels of enquiry. First, where could he hire good horses; secondly, how could he find qualified teachers of French and also, if possible, of German. Curiously enough he appears to have been more successful in discovering good horses than good teachers. The former never failed, whether at Pau, at Argelès, at Bagnères-de-Bigorre or at Lourdes—and the quality of the animals was so satisfactory that Hugo purchased one of them and had it transported to England.

The happiness of these days was increased for Douglas Haig when in the middle of March the sister nearest to him in age, Henrietta, joined them. Since the death of their mother she had become, and she was long to remain, the principal influence in his life. She had married at eighteen Mr. William Jameson, a man of considerable wealth and an amateur yachtsman of exceptional skill. The couple were childless and all Mrs. Jameson's maternal affections were centred upon her youngest brother. Her love and her assistance were to prove of capital importance to his career, and the deep affection that he felt for her never wavered from his early childhood until the day when he breathed his last breath under her roof.

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Early in April the party returned to England, stopping in Paris on the way. They arrived at the *Hôtel des Deux Mondes* one Sunday evening, and at ten o'clock next morning the two brothers were out riding in the Bois. "The horses were fine big fat 'uns. Hugo changed with me three times."

They dined that night at the *Café anglais*. "Hugo has asparagus—28 francs worth, i.e. 14 francs a portion"—(He had informed them the night before that his life depended on asparagus.) "Afterwards we go to see Sarah Bernhardt as *Fédora* at the Vaudeville Theatre. This play is by Victorien Sardou and is wonderfully cleverly written. The last scene is most touching in which *Fédora* dies in the arms of Ipanoff (Paul Berton). Hugo was very bored and only sat out one act: it was most selfish of him to take Henrietta away too as she was very anxious to see Sarah's fine dresses. I get home about 12 and find Henrietta waiting up for me."

Two more days in Paris were spent in the same way—riding in the morning, luncheon at Durand's, dinner at the *Café anglais* and on each evening Douglas Haig went alone to the *Théâtre français* where he enjoyed the plays. Then they returned to England and he went back to Oxford for his last term.

He was living in lodgings in King Edward Street at this time and once more polo, dinner parties and club elections fill the diary, but every morning is devoted to work and principally to the study of French. One of the first elections was to the Vampyres, the Brasenose Sunday luncheon club. "Lane and Gore only had 4 votes! Principally because they had got into Bullingdon! Such jealousy seems to reign among the fellows!"

The comment and the exclamation marks were characteristic. He was to be the observer of so many manifesta-

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tions of this strange weakness in the course of his career, and it never ceased to astonish him.

The following unusually lengthy entry for April 18th must cause regret that there are not more of the same nature—giving as it does so full a picture of so full a life.

“Breakfast with Noll at 8.30 as usual and read till 10 c. During the morning Walker the vet came to see me and advised blistering the mare’s knee—I agree to this. The boy whom I engaged as groom yesterday for 16/- a week began work today. The two ponies arrived at 9.40 from Dublin. They left at 12.30 yesterday. I went to see them after lunch: the bay pony I bought in February last does not seem to have been much groomed, she did not eat her feed well. T. Turbett also sent a small black pony; he ate his grub well. T. T. paid £26 for this latter and he says in his letter received this morning—‘I hope I shall be able to sell him at a profit to satisfy.’

“I also went to the College Cricket field at Cowley and had a practice. I batted well considering that I had not touched a bat for at least three years. I found our old chief Cradock looking on and conversed with him on various subjects. He takes a great interest in everything connected with the games of the College.

“Dinner at 7 o’c with Noll. Macdonnell and Lord Henry Bentinck dined with us. After dinner we have great argument on the present evils of the Church, notably the narrow-minded views of clergymen and their hypocrisy (*sic*). Mac. talked loudly but did not listen to our arguments, he was all in favour of the ‘good work done by the Church’. Jumbo (Bentinck) listened but said little; Noll stammered out his views on ‘Charity’ which, he said, ‘was never preached to the people’. I must say I thought he had right on his side tho’ he could not express his feelings. Something does seem to be wrong in younger sons enter-

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ing the Church because there is a living in their family and not because they have an inclination to it. Noll left and went to his couch at 10 p.m. I finished the argument amicably and we parted about eleven.

"At dinner we had discussed the meanness of some fathers to their sons up here in the hopes of making them acquire the knowledge of the value of money—such as the Duke of Westminster to Henry Grosvenor who is obliged to bet a little in order to get some money and Puppy Weymouth who is allowed £300 a year by the Marquess of Bath his father. To bed about 11.30. Today the City & Suburban was run. Roisterer won—betting 50 to 1. Most people here backed Shotover but lost of course as he was nowhere."

The state of the Church and the stinginess of parents form a delightful selection of conversational topics for an Oxford dinner party—and how refreshingly undergraduate is the philosophy in which the smallness of an income is accepted as adequate justification for endeavouring to augment it by speculation.

Once again the politics of Vincent's claim attention.

"After lunch," on Sunday, April 22nd, "I walked round the Parks with Tommy Hitchcock. He tells me that there is quite a division in College as to whom they should run for Vincent's Committee. Puxley wanted to run himself and Asher. P. and Pike were run last time but neither got on. Rather than have a split in College I said I had no intention of standing. Owing however to the pressure of all the other colleges and of some members in B.N.C. Puxley and his committee decided to run himself and me—with Asher as a third man . . . I went to chapel at 5.15 and Whittuck the Vice-Principal preached a sermon. At 7 I went to dine with Lubbock at the Mitre. There were 16 there. I sat next my host and Walker. At 8 we went to

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Vincent's. There was hardly standing room. No one had ever seen so many at an election. All the members from Christchurch were there, none of whom (10 in all) had ever been at an election before. All Univ. and Balliol were there. These last were afraid of their representative Grey being turned off the Committee. Thanks to Noll everyone had agreed to vote for me! His endeavours were really wonderful; and excitement intense. Such was the crowd that great difficulty was experienced in collecting the voting papers. The result was that I got 65 votes, Puxley 21. Three other members of Committee got 70. This result was due entirely to Noll who really worked very hard. Most of the papers were 'Old Committee + Douglas Haig'. There was only one vacancy in it. Those elected were Peterson (pres.) Stirling (auditor) Beaumont (sec.) Walker, Macdonnell, Ord, Cave, Sir E. Grey and myself.

"After election we had a meeting of Committee. I then went to Bromley Davenport's rooms in Balliol where music and dessert were going on. I got back to my lodgings about 11.30."

Comments on his fellow undergraduates are interesting in retrospect, and reveal as much of the writer as they do of the subject. The present Bishop of Exeter, then Lord William Cecil, is described as follows: "The Fish seems a clever chap and can talk away most amusingly. His clothes, poor fellow, are not of the most swagger! In fact very seedy resembling the garb of a scholar." Later on when the younger brother, Lord Robert, appears on the scene—"This Cecil like his brother does not waste much money on his clothes. He is long and thin, stoops somewhat and plays real tennis. Riding he does not care for." The occasion of this meeting was a dinner at Pom Macdonnell's, and the diary continues: "I had a great argument with T. Hitchcock on the merit of back hand strokes at

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polo, as against turning the ball. I maintained that the back hand stroke was the game for the Oxford team to play on account of the ponies not being very good."

It is not recorded that Lord Robert Cecil took any part in this discussion.

The next day was Sunday. "Lunch at the Vampyres. Ormsby Gore and Scott spoke, both very feeble. Gore on his legs for fifteen minutes while he could only talk for two. These lunches are a mistake—one eats too much and they prevent one getting out of Oxford for a good walk. A walk with the Tout (Beaumont) to the polo ground on Port Meadow near Wolvercot. I got back in time for chapel. Dinner at 7.15. Barry, Ormsby Gore, Stuart, Steele, Kirkpatrick. I was much annoyed with Saunders for not sending up enough potatoes to go round. The dinner was quiet, the conversation intellectual. We discussed the merits of the Channel Tunnel. Most people thought that the only advantages to be got from it would be that fresh spring vegetables and flowers would be brought to the London market quicker."

Throughout his life Haig was not disposed to think evil of his fellow men. In this first diary criticisms and character sketches are invariably kind and tolerant. The harshest judgment that he passes on anybody is "he seems to be rather a snob and talks a heap of rubbish; I could almost fancy him unscrupulous."

Yet even so early the ugly side of life obtruded itself, for a member of Vincent's was caught cheating at cards, and Haig together with the rest of the Committee had to adjudicate. They "discussed the matter till twelve p.m., Macdonnell laying down the case in a lawyer-like way. Rather comic had not the occasion been so serious."

The meeting was adjourned until the next morning, when it was decided to request the guilty member to



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withdraw from the club, which he apparently did for no more is heard of him.

"After the meeting we all went to look for some means of decorating the club as the Prince of Wales was coming this evening. It was rather late to decide on illuminations as there was not much time for putting them up. We got all the Boat Club flags and hung them across the street. At night we had a large gas star and a lot of small lamps put round the windows, so altogether the club did not look so unadorned. . . .

"We went out to see the illuminations after dinner. The streets were crowded with a set of roughs only to be found in Oxford. From one end of the High to another there was a free fight going on. There was a concert in the new Schools and the Prince who had arrived at 6 and was staying with Mr. Liddell at Christchurch drove down the High at 9.15 amid all the rioting and fighting. Kemp harangued the crowd from Vincent's club on all subjects for about an hour ranging between the building society lately gone smash, and Bradlaugh and the Affirmation Bill. There was one seething mass in front of the windows, which hustled and swayed to and fro. At length when Kemp's eloquence was getting exhausted, they took to throwing stones and one window was smashed."

So that last summer term passed away as so many summer terms have, and will again, on the banks of the Isis. There were polo matches, there were warm evenings on the river, there was even some light-hearted cricket when he played for the Bullingdon against the Cardinals from Cambridge and when he "caught a good catch with one hand in the deep field much to the astonishment of myself and the onlookers", there were luncheon parties and dinner parties, there were cards and music, there was harmless ragging and there was serious scandal but, amid all the

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temptations that such a season offers to vigorous youth, Douglas Haig maintained the even tenor of his way, keeping always the goal in sight and passing his examinations in the end.

### NOTE

It may be of interest to the reader to learn what became of some of Haig's undergraduate friends in later life. Harry Portman subsequently became the 3rd Viscount Portman and died in 1923. Mr. John Cator was at one time Member of Parliament for Huntingdon and is now High Sheriff of Norfolk. Of Barton and Melville, who lived at 4 Turl Street, the former was connected with the famous claret of that name and went out to live in France, while the latter was Beresford V. Melville, who was at one time Member of Parliament for Stockport and is no longer alive. Portal, mentioned on page 23, is now Sir Spencer Portal, Chairman of the Trustee Savings Banks Association, and Bromley-Davenport is Brigadier-General Sir William Bromley-Davenport, K.C.B.

Rawson was the late R. H. R. Rawson, formerly Member of Parliament for Reigate and father of Lady Leconfield and Lady Warrender. Sirwell is Sir George Sitwell, whose family has justly obtained celebrity. Tommy Hitchcock was the famous American polo player, whose son with the same Christian name was equally famous. Charles Trefusis is the present Lord Clinton, to whom, as to Lord Askwith, the author is much indebted for assistance in tracing many of these references. His nickname was Fuchsia, but Haig's spelling of it has been retained in the text. Ormsby-Gore is the Hon. Seymour Ormsby-Gore—at one time Member of Parliament for Gainsborough. Macpherson-Grant was Sir John Macpherson-Grant, Bart., who died in 1914, and Brassey was the second Earl Brassey who died in 1919. Noll was the Hon. Oliver Wallop and is now Lord Portsmouth. Macdonnell, whose nickname was Pom, was the late Sir Schomberg Macdonnell, who was for many years private secretary to the late Lord Salisbury, and who died of wounds in 1915. Lord Henry Bentinck was the well-known Member of Parliament, and Grey was Sir Edward Grey, afterwards Viscount Grey of Fallodon.

## Chapter II

### SEVENTH HUSSARS

When Douglas Haig came down from Oxford in the summer of 1883, he had passed the examinations, known as Groups, which entitled him to a degree but, as he had missed one term out of his three years owing to illness, he was debarred from actually taking the degree until he should have completed, by coming up for another term, the required period of residence. He had no intention, however, of wasting any more time and, apart from a short holiday in France, he spent the interval between Oxford and Sandhurst at a crammer's, a Mr. Litchfield of Hampton Court, where he prepared himself for the entrance examination.

In those days a University graduate could present himself for the Sandhurst examination up to the age of twenty-two. Haig was more than halfway through his twenty-third year when in February 1884 he entered the Royal Military College.

The system which thus permitted Army candidates to avail themselves both of a University education and of the technical training provided by the War Department had one important advantage. At the age at which cadets now enter Sandhurst or Woolwich, seventeen or eighteen, they retain to some extent the irresponsibility of boyhood; they come straight from school; they are avid of pleasure in all its forms and they have a natural and healthy disinclination

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for concentrated study. But if a man is ever going to take his life seriously he will be prepared to do so at the age of twenty-two after having spent three comparatively easy years at the University. This was certainly the case with Haig. He now set himself with all the determination of his earnest nature to the task of rendering himself an efficient officer. His contemporaries at Sandhurst can still remember the sensation, almost of awe, with which they regarded such an appetite and capacity for hard work in one of their companions.

The diary ceases during this period. The leisure necessary for its continuance was lacking, but we may be sure that there were no more luncheon or dinner parties to be recorded. Polo was now his sole form of relaxation and polo, after all, as an aid to horsemanship, is of direct assistance in the training of a cavalry officer. It was here at Sandhurst that the legend of Haig, as of a man who must one day rise to the highest command, originated. Such labours were not without their reward. At the end of the year, in December 1884, he passed out first in order of merit, and he was awarded the Anson Memorial Sword as Senior Under-Officer, the highest honour which Sandhurst has to offer. On February 7th, 1885, he received his commission in the 7th Hussars.

The years that followed were uneventful. They were years of profound peace both in Europe and throughout the world. Khartoum had fallen and Great Britain had seemed to accept that blow to her prestige without protest or thought of vengeance. The partitioning of Africa between European Powers was proceeding unobtrusively and almost unnoticed. In 1885 both the British and the German East Africa Companies were formed. In 1886 an Anglo-German agreement delimited the sphere within which the two Companies should operate. In 1887 Queen

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Victoria held her jubilee, and in 1888 William II became Emperor of Germany. Two years later he banished Bismarck from his councils and Sir William Harcourt wrote to John Morley, "It is not a pleasant prospect to have Europe left at the mercy of a hothead who seems also to be a fool."

Haig's diaries during this period contain little of moment. It would be surprising if they did. Records of polo matches still occupy the greater part of the space, and they are supplemented by details of journeys with careful noting of the hours of departure and arrival, and, when at sea, of the number of miles steamed each day. Facts of this nature form a fatal trap for diarists. They appear to possess importance at the time, but in retrospect, even when the reader is also the writer, they are devoid of the slightest interest.

In August 1886 he was one of a team selected to play polo for England against the United States, and in consequence paid his second visit to America. The first match was played at Newport on August 25th, and the second three days later. His old Oxford friend, Tommy Hitchcock, was one of the opposing team but, despite his prowess, the Americans were easily defeated by ten goals to four and fourteen goals to two. These were indeed the days of England's greatness.

On his return he was given a short period of leave, and went to Scotland in order to bid goodbye to all his relatives before proceeding with his regiment to India.

"Thursday, November 25th was a bitterly cold morning, snow on the ground and a biting wind, when the 7th Hussars fell in on the gravel in front of the Mess Hut." They were stationed at Shorncliffe at the time and were conveyed by train to Portsmouth, where they embarked on the *Euphrates*, which was one of the last of the old troopships. The voyage was uneventful. "The passen-

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gers are as a whole an uninteresting lot. Several newly married couples, greatly taken up with each other. One Colonel, going out to command a Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, is dubbed by the ladies 'the Sentry' from the care he takes of his young wife. Five or six doctors on board, mostly married. One, styled 'the dirty Doctor', a German-looking creature, excites the jealousy of an infantry Captain: both have just lately entered the matrimonial state, and both men's wives are in the same cabin. The Doctor has the pull over the other, he can visit his wife's cabin to administer physic. The other feels annoyed, no doubt: there are words and recourse is had to the Captain of the ship. But women are at the bottom of all quarrels."

This last bitter and sweeping statement from a man of twenty-five might be thought to indicate unfortunate experience. It is therefore the more remarkable to find so little in these diaries to suggest that the writer recognises the existence of another sex. Prior to his marriage no woman is mentioned with any particularity except his sisters and relations; no name even by the frequency of its occurrence can raise suspicion. That he was extremely reserved and would not have confided a love affair even to his private diary may be admitted, but when we read the portions of the diary which cover, for instance, his periods of leave in England, detailed accounts of how every day was spent, where every meal was eaten and who was present, and can find no suggestion of any one individual, outside the family circle, being more welcome than another, we must conclude that this handsome young officer was in truth wedded to his profession.

Shooting expeditions are the only rivals of polo matches for space in the diary, and there are long gaps, during which there was presumably nothing to recount. Lieutenant J. W. Beresford, now Lord Decies, who was a great

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friend at this time, accompanied him on one of these shooting trips and proved "a most amusing companion".

In 1888 he became Adjutant of the regiment and henceforth the entries in the diary become less concerned with sport and more with military training. In 1889 and again in 1890 he enjoyed short periods of European leave, the greater part of which was spent in London, although on each occasion he paused in Paris on his way from Marseilles, and in 1890 he visited Monte Carlo, where he gambled with characteristic caution, coming away neither a winner nor a loser.

In 1891 he took no leave to Europe but visited instead the two extremes of the Indian Empire, Ceylon and the North-West Frontier. In this year also he was specially selected by the Inspector General of Cavalry to act as Brigade Major at the cavalry camp at Aligarh. In January 1892 he was again selected for special duty, at the Poona camp, and was attached to the Headquarters Staff of the Bombay Army. This year he travelled still farther afield, paying a visit to Australia. He was most hospitably entertained wherever he went, and thoroughly enjoyed the visit. But during these long holidays and living the leisurely life of a regimental officer, his ambition to obtain complete mastery of his profession remained unsatisfied. He was very popular with his brother officers, but his mind was occupied with thoughts that they could not share. "Take Beresford and Toby Liebert out at 6.30 a.m.," he writes one day, "to show them how to use a plane table and make a sketch. Fancy two officers so long in the service to be ignorant of such small matters." These things were always surprising him.

But now he took the important decision to present himself for the Staff College examination. He knew that it would probably mean a severance from the regiment



HAIG AS A SUBALTERN IN THE 7TH HUSSARS





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which he could not contemplate without regret. Some of his brother officers came to see him off on the boat from Bombay. This is his description of the scene:

"Find Regimental Sergeant Major Humphries waiting at launch for me. We all go on board *Peninsular*—quite melancholy parting. Humphries wrung my hand and said I was 'the best sort he had ever had to do with'. They go down the ladder into a small boat, the tide running very strong towards the lighthouse. I watched them with my glasses till they were quite a small speck, and were out near Colaba point. It was about 6 p.m., and getting dark. I feel quite sorry at leaving them all."

The genuine simplicity of the emotion, and the studious moderation of the language in which it is expressed are equally characteristic of the writer.

The year 1893 brought to Haig a severe disappointment and the only set-back that he ever received in his military career. He had spent in serious study the greater part of the interval between his arrival in England in the previous September and the Staff College examination in June. He had lived for some time with a German family at Düsseldorf in order to improve his knowledge of that language. But in spite of all his efforts he failed. Not only did he fall short by eighteen marks in mathematics, which was one of the obligatory subjects, but he was also rejected—and this was far more serious—on the ground that he was suffering from colour blindness. He protested against this decision and adduced the testimony of a certain Professor Mohren, whom he described as "the great German oculist", who had certified him as free from this defect. As he succeeded in getting into Staff College three years later, we must assume that the Professor's word was accepted. It was a subject upon which he always felt extremely sensi-

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tive, and with regard to which no jokes were permitted. Years afterwards, when he was riding with his aide-de-camp across the plains of Flanders, he pointed to a field in the middle distance and commented on the beauty of the scarlet poppies that were growing there. The discreet aide-de-camp murmured his agreement, but looking where the Commander-in-Chief was pointing, he could see nothing but the rich brown earth recently turned by the plough.

There is no diary for the year 1893, nor for the year that follows. It is possible that he destroyed anything that he wrote during those years. He must have been suffering from that sense of frustration and wasted effort which overcomes all men who devote their lives to the public service and who, after years of conscientious labour, see others, whom they know to be their inferiors, soaring above them. By entering the Army through Oxford, he had already lost seniority, and his equals in rank were by several years his juniors in age. He had now to return to his regiment in India with the bitterness of failure in his heart.

How he conducted himself in these circumstances can best be judged from a letter addressed to him by his Commanding Officer, Colonel Hamish Reid, in April of the following year, 1894, when he was leaving the regiment once again:

“My dear Douglas,

I cannot let you go without saying how I have appreciated what you have done for the Regiment. You came back to a position that a great many people would have disliked extremely, second fiddle in a squadron. Instead of making a grievance of it all, I know what a lot of pains you have taken and how much the improvement in that squadron has been owing to you; and up to the last moment when you knew you were off, you have taken

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just as much interest in the preliminary musketry in the squadron as if you would be here to see the results. I cannot say how much you will be missed by all of us, officers, N.C.Os. and men. Your example in the regiment has been worth everything to the boys. You know I wish you every luck. You are, I think, bound to succeed because you mean to. I hate saying 'goodbye' as I am sadly afraid I shall never soldier with you again, but only hope I may.

Yours very sincerely,

Hamish Reid."

He returned to England in order to act as aide-de-camp to General Sir Keith Fraser during the autumn manoeuvres. Fraser was then Inspector General of Cavalry, and was fully aware of the extent to which the cavalry required bringing up to date in order to render them efficient for modern warfare. Haig, therefore, could learn much from him both in the theory, and, during manoeuvres, in the practice of war. He did not, however, confine his study of cavalry methods to those which were followed in his own country. In the autumn of 1893, while on leave in Europe, and again in the autumn of 1894, he paid visits to France which proved of great value to himself and to the Intelligence Division of the War Office. In September 1893 he attended the cavalry manoeuvres in Touraine. His report, which runs to some forty folio pages, was transmitted to the War Office by the Military Attaché in Paris with a covering note to the effect that "by the courtesy of the French Officers, Captain Haig was afforded unusually favourable opportunities of seeing and judging all that was done".

The concluding paragraph of this report is interesting: "The French cavalry is composed of excellent material. Horses and men of all ranks stood the hard work well. The

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cavalry divisions reconnoitre, and are led to the attack, I venture to think, in accordance with common-sense principles. Still they might be a great deal better than they are. Napoleon has written that 'a cavalry force, to be of any use, must be composed of young generals and old captains'. Now the fault of the French cavalry is that they have too many old officers in both ranks. In any case, whatever the shortcomings of the French cavalry in the matter of precision and exactness in movements may be, I feel certain that their methods of reconnoitring and ideas on handling a cavalry division in the field deserve fully as much attention by thoughtful soldiers as do the actions of their neighbours across the Rhine."

In October 1894 he was present at the experimental mobilisation of a reserve regiment of cavalry which took place at Limoges. This proved a less interesting operation than that which he had witnessed the previous year. The very full report, however, which he sent home, was considered by the War Office to deserve the dignity of print.

For the year 1895, we once more have the assistance of a diary. He was busy in January assisting Sir Keith Fraser in the preparation of his report on the manoeuvres and, after the General had left for the south of France, he devoted the rest of the winter to hunting from a small house that he had taken in Warwickshire. Hunting, however, never made so powerful an appeal to him as polo, and many of his friends suspected that he hunted rather because he considered it the right way in which a cavalry officer should spend his leisure than on account of the pleasure that he derived from the sport. If scent was bad and the prospects of sport seemed doubtful, he would often desert the field early in the day, and when his companions returned they would find that he had already settled down to the study of his military tomes.

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Having already inspected the cavalry methods of France, with a view to discovering what England had to learn in these matters, he was now anxious to supplement his experience by the pursuit of similar studies in Germany. Accordingly, in the spring of this year, he paid a visit to Berlin, where he was received with the greatest courtesy in German military circles. Every facility was placed at his disposal; nothing in the way of hospitality was omitted. He made many friends during his stay, and retained a favourable impression of the German people which even the fever of the War never obliterated.

"I am getting on very well here," he writes to his sister Henrietta on May 4th, 1895. "All the German officers I have met do everything to make my stay agreeable and show me anything I want. The only officer who does not go out of his way to assist me is Colonel Swaine, our own Military Attaché. He has been here for nine years, is a friend of the Emperor's and can do pretty well anything he likes. . . . I did not want his help except once: that was for yesterday. The Emperor inspected 4 Infantry Battalions on the Tempelhofer Feld, where I go every morning. My Regiment (the 1st Guard Dragoons) had been ordered to parade also—to attack the infantry or for some game of that sort. The officers said if I went with Swaine and the other attachés, I would see everything. I suggested this to Swaine. He said there would be nothing to see and that I would be much better to be at the side of the field where the crowd is allowed to stand; in fact where you could see nothing. However I did not mind this but got my horse from the regiment as usual. Luckily von Loë, the Governor of Berlin, on whom I had called with a letter from old Keith, met me on my way to the Tempelhofer Feld, introduced himself and took me onto the ground. I rode about without molestation until the firing and tactical inspection

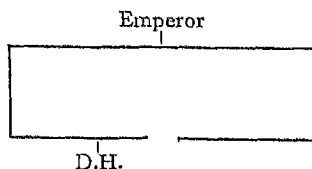
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began, when a mounted policeman of sorts rode up and said it was forbidden for me to be where I was. Old von Loë saw the man coming and at once galloped up and rode beside me for the rest of the day—asked senior officers what orders they had received, etc. simply for my information. I therefore saw everything and knew more about what was going on than if I had been with Swaine. Von Loë when he bade me goodbye said to be sure and let him know at any time if I wanted anything. . . .

“I am just off to see Field Marshal von Blumenthal. He called on me at 7.10 a.m. two days ago. I was in my bath. He must be 80 or more.”

On May 31st he wrote: “I came back from Potsdam yesterday for the ‘Parade Tafel’ at 6 p.m. in the Emperor’s Schloss here. It was von Plessen, the General in Command of the Emperor’s military household who got me the invitation. I told you before of him: he is a very nice fellow and must have taken a lot of trouble about the business, as you will see from the way I was treated.

“I went in uniform of course, and on reaching the Palace had a big staircase to go up and then through several galleries. In the latter there were Court officials with the names and places of the guests. I saw three or four of them but none knew about me but passed me farther along. Then a nice old boy came up and asked me by name if he might show me my place at table. I found myself not among the foreign officers but at the end of the table opposite the Emperor thus :



On my right was a Colonel Crosigk who commands the

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Fusilier Guards here—and a great friend of the Emperor. After we had been a certain time at dinner the Emperor drank his health, then signalled to him that he wished to drink my health. So I stood up and emptied my glass to the Kaiser in the usual style—‘nae hiel taps’. He did the same.

“... After dinner we went into the picture gallery and the Emperor came and asked me about my regiment, about Keith Fraser and what I was anxious to do and the length of leave which I had. Altogether he was most friendly.”

Before leaving Berlin he asked his sister to choose him some presents for his new friends. “They have all been so kind here that I would like just to give a few of them a little present. . . . You can spend £30 or more if you like, but I must have genuine articles that will last: for of course it would never do to say to me next time I came back, ‘what rubbishy things are made in England’. Get whatever you like: but you know they always wear uniform, so pins and that sort of thing are no use, but of course they smoke considerably.” Then follows a list of eight officers. Perhaps there were some of them who carried into the Great War these tokens of friendship and of happier days presented to them by the British Commander-in-Chief.

His visit to Germany was brought to an abrupt conclusion when he learnt that Sir Evelyn Wood was about to conduct a “staff tour” in England, beginning on June 21st; that Colonel French was to command the cavalry on one side and that he had been invited to act as French’s Staff Officer. He therefore returned with all speed, and it was as well that he did so, for these manoeuvres proved of some importance to his future career. Not only did they mark the beginning of his connection with French, but they also were the occasion of his first meeting with Sir Evelyn



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Wood, who then held the position of Quartermaster General, and who was to prove a loyal and useful friend.

In the following month he went to Kissingen for the cure, whence he wrote to his sister:

"I received a civil letter from Sir Evelyn Wood mentioning something he wished me to tell him about connected with the German Army. His last sentence was as follows—'It gave me much pleasure to meet you and have a talk, and the more so because I knew you pretty well on paper before. I think I may honestly say of you, what we cannot always say, that the expectation, though great, was even less than the pleasure you gave me by your conversation.' I told you that we got on very well together. Sir E. W. is a capital fellow to have upon one's side as he always gets his own way."

The following is the letter which he wrote to Sir Evelyn Wood at the same time, and in an appendix will be found the enclosure containing the information which had been asked for with regard to the German army. The whole of this statement, so clear in exposition, so minute in detail, is written out in Haig's easily legible hand; it was done at Kissingen, where he had presumably no books of reference, and certainly no assistance, and it must have still further enhanced the high opinion that the veteran general had already formed of the young captain's capabilities.

"Englischer Hof

Kissingen, Germany.

Dear Sir Evelyn,

*Tuesday.*

9. VII. 95.

I was greatly delighted to receive your kind letter, and thank you very much for what you say about me. I shall always remember with more than pleasure the kindly way you spoke to me during the staff tour.

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I now enclose a few notes in answer to that question you asked me about the share taken by N.C.Os. in polishing up the young soldier in Germany.

I wish I could have given you more *detailed* information regarding the work done by N.C.Os. in the infantry. To tell you the truth my time at Berlin was devoted entirely to cavalry work, tho' what I have put down regarding the infantry is what I know to be *the fact*. I hope however to find out in more detail the work of the company before I return.

I am drinking the waters here as I had not got over the effects of fever which I used to get in India, but when this course is finished I shall return to England via Berlin where I know plenty of officers in the infantry.

There is an officer (cavalry) Lieut. von Bülow<sup>1</sup> of the General Staff (in Berlin) coming to England *on leave* for the month of August. He is anxious to see something of the manoeuvres in the New Forest, and the Cavalry Division which is to be formed at Aldershot. I take the liberty of asking whether you would get him permission to go to the New Forest. I am, I understand, to be a Brigade Major at the Aldershot drills, so I can look after him and give him one of my horses to ride when he comes there.

Please forgive the liberty I have taken in asking this for Bülow, but I have received so much assistance and kindness from German officers of all ranks that I feel sure you won't mind. It was from Bülow that I got two accounts of how cavalry staff tours (*Uebungsreisen*) are carried out in Germany. I translated them and gave them to Colonel French with a request (if he thought fit) to ask you to look at them. The papers are not in the least confidential, but these Germans are so peculiar in some things that

<sup>1</sup> Not the von Bülow who commanded the Second Army in 1914, but a cousin.

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I should not like it known how the papers came into my possession.

Again thanking you for your kindness to me and hoping the notes I now send may in some measure answer the question you asked me,

I beg to remain,  
Yours very truly,  
Douglas Haig."

In the autumn he attended manoeuvres in the capacity of Brigade Major. It was the last year in which the Duke of Cambridge was to officiate as Commander-in-Chief. Haig met him at a camp luncheon with the Household Regiment on Twealdown Hill. "During lunch H.R.H. (who sat at the end of the horseshoe table while I was nearly opposite in the bend) expatiated against the *Times* and Lonsdale Hale who had said that he was too feeble as C.-in-C. He then made a short speech and a dramatic exit without sitting down after talking."

The only duty that remained for Haig to perform during 1895 was the completion of the new *Cavalry Drill Book* which French had begun but had left unfinished on his promotion to the position of Assistant Adjutant General. That such a task should have been entrusted to so junior an officer is evidence of the high opinion generally held of his attainments. When this was finished he devoted the rest of the winter to hunting until he entered Staff College in January of 1896.

During the twenty-two months that he spent at the Staff College no diary was kept, and few letters of this period survive. There were many among his fellow students who afterwards acquired celebrity, Lord Allenby, Sir Richard Haking, Sir Thompson Capper, Sir William



A PHOTOGRAPH OF HAIG TAKEN  
AT DARMSTADT



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Furse, Sir George Macdonogh and Sir J. E. Edmonds, the official Historian of the War. It is the more surprising in view of the amount of talent there collected that Haig's superiority should have been sufficiently outstanding to lead the Chief Instructor, Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, the author of *Stonewall Jackson*, to prophesy that he would one day be Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. Nor was this one of those prophecies which are only remembered after they are fulfilled. General Edmonds never forgot it, and when Haig was given the Aldershot Command in 1911 he wrote to remind him of it, pointing out that even then the fulfilment of the prophecy was incomplete. To which Haig replied on August 31st, 1911: "I think that dear old Henderson must have been talking very much through his hat when he said that he thought I would ever be Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. I only wish to be of some use somewhere."

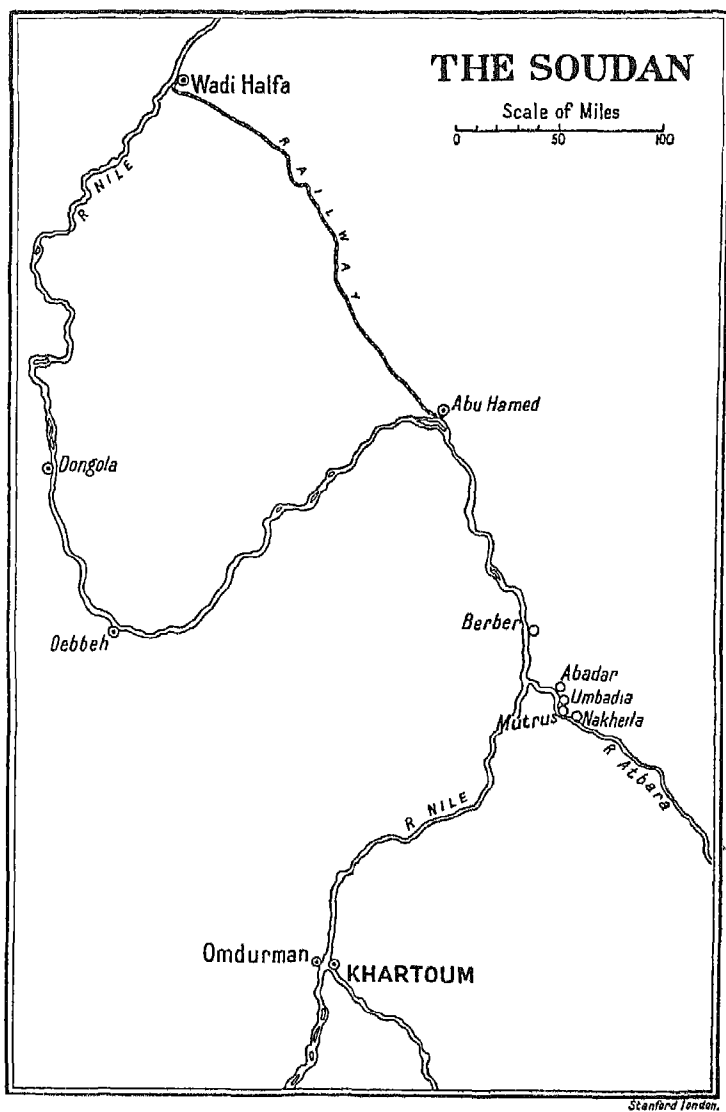
It was very soon after he left the Staff College that his first opportunity of being "of some use somewhere" occurred.

## Chapter III

# THE SUDAN

**I**t has already been mentioned that in January 1886 the British flag and General Gordon fell at Khartoum. For ten long years the tyranny of the Mahdi and of his successor, the Khalifa, held undisputed sway over the whole of the Sudan. But during that interval preparations had been going tirelessly though unobtrusively forward in order to secure that vengeance, though it might be slow, should be very sure and quite complete. The first blow was struck in 1896 when British and Egyptian troops under the command of General Kitchener reconquered the province of Dongola. In 1897 Kitchener undertook, against the advice of every expert, the stupendous task of building a railway over two hundred and thirty miles of waterless desert in the centre of a hostile country. When that achievement had been completed the main problem of the campaign was solved. All that remained to do was to convey the resources of civilisation to the scene of battle, where there was nothing to oppose them but the countless hordes of barbarous fanatics.

Meanwhile it was towards the Sudan that the eyes of every ambitious soldier in Great Britain were turned with longing. The number of British troops to take part in the campaign was strictly limited, but it was possible for a British officer to obtain permission to accept a temporary commission in the Egyptian Army. Many applied but few were chosen. Douglas Haig was among the fortunate ones.







## THE SUDAN

Sir Evelyn Wood was now Adjutant General, and it was from him that Haig received a telegram on January 4th, 1898, "Will be selected for Egyptian Army." A fortnight later he left England.

Before setting forth, however, he received an invitation to spend from Saturday to Monday at Sandringham with the Prince and Princess of Wales. His brother-in-law, Mr. Jameson, was the link between him and the Court and this was not the first occasion on which Haig had met his future sovereign.

He arrived late on Saturday evening through making the natural mistake of thinking that the train would leave from Liverpool Street rather than from St. Pancras. He therefore did not join the party until after dinner. The Duke and Duchess of York were staying there, and the party included Princess Victoria, Sir Evelyn Wood, Sir George Harrison, Lord Claud Hamilton, Sir George Holford, Mr. Christopher Sykes and the Bishop of Ripon.

"*Sunday, January 23rd.* Princess and some go to church about 11.30. The Prince, Holford, Sykes and self go in at 12. *Excellent* sermon from the Bishop on Gordon—Hebrews, Ch. XI., verse 8. 'And he went out, not knowing whither he went.'

"Before lunch see dogs York Cottage. After lunch walk round with Princess and see gardens, yearlings, mares in foal, etc. After dinner discuss cavalry organisation, Indian frontier, etc. with H.R.H. Difficulty in finding a good map of Central Asia! H.R.H. desires me to 'write regularly' to him from Egypt."

He left early the next morning.

After a dull journey Haig arrived on February 3rd at Cairo, where he remained for a few days. He signed an agreement to serve with the Egyptian Army for two years, receiving at the same time a comforting assurance that there

## THE SUDAN

would be no difficulty about terminating his contract earlier should he desire to do so. He found several old army friends, who assisted him in his purchases of supplementary kit, including 3 tarbooshes which as an Egyptian officer he wore with his old Indian uniform.

"The longer I stay here the more lucky I seem to be in having got to this Egyptian Army. The crowd of fellows that have asked to be taken and been refused is very great. . . . Kitchener will only take the best now and picks and chooses from the hundreds who are anxious to come."

From Cairo he proceeded up the Nile in the wake of the Army. There is no campaign so easy to follow as that of the River War, consisting as it did of the steady advance southwards from Wadi Halfa, and guided as it was by the course of the river. The only short cut was the railway so boldly and so successfully thrown across the desert from Wadi Halfa to Abu Hamed, thus avoiding the great detour that the Nile makes into the province of Dongola.

On February 15th, Haig arrived at Wadi Halfa, where he found himself for the first time in the presence of the Sirdar. He mentions both in his diary and his letters the kindness and cordiality with which he was received, although these were qualities which Kitchener did not always display to junior officers on first acquaintance. But Haig's reputation had evidently gone before him.

The Sirdar told him that he would probably be required to take charge of a squadron at Debbeh, which had hitherto been commanded by a native officer, and which needed bringing up to the mark. A few days later, however, he received instructions to proceed immediately to Berber, where he arrived on February 28th.

All this time he was maintaining a regular correspondence, not only with his sister Henrietta, to whom he wrote mainly about his material needs, but also with Sir Evelyn

## THE SUDAN

Wood, to whom he gave valuable information not unmingled with criticism concerning the military aspects of the campaign.

"I am half doubtful whether I should give you my opinion of the Native Army without being asked for it first of all. So I won't give you my *opinion*, but will state what I have seen and you can then judge for yourself as to whether the Brigades are trained *to fight*. First, the Commanding Officers of battalions do not delegate any power at all to their British officers, but run the whole show themselves. I have seen on more than one occasion that fire discipline does not exist. There may be section commanders (in name), but the sighting of the rifles and firing of the men is not attended to when attacking a position. There seems to be only one position in which men fire, viz. rear rank standing, front rank kneeling. I have seen the sight at 700 yards all through a mimic battle! As regards the marching of the Blacks, they are apparently allowed to fall out and straggle to any extent. While in the vicinity of the marching column, many groups of women may be seen carrying huge bundles on their heads. Now I am told that the men are 'not supposed' to have their wives with them, yet there is no doubt that the Blacks won't march without them, and the islands opposite here are full of the wives of the 3 Battalions which are now quartered here. Why not recognise the fact and allow the women, within moderate proportions? At present the men must give away part of their rations to keep their wives for there is little or nothing to be bought in the country. But though I am not impressed with the *battle* training of the Blacks and their *march discipline*, they seem fine strong fellows and move well. The real pity is that so many valuable and keen young officers are not more used to train the men. Most of my friends who were at the Staff College with me complain

## THE SUDAN

that they find it difficult to find work to do, as their Commanding Officers do not allow them to do anything! We are much more fortunate in the Cavalry, as each squadron leader has a free hand entirely, and can train his men as he likes."

Berber is situated on the Nile a few miles north of the junction between that river and the Atbara. The cavalry who were stationed in the vicinity had the duty of making daily reconnaissances along the banks of the Atbara. The enemy were known to be not far distant and in considerable force. It was during one of the reconnaissances that Haig first came under fire in circumstances that might very easily have proved more serious than they did.

He sent the following account of the incident to Sir Evelyn Wood:

"The task of the Brigade was to reconnoitre Umbadia and discover the enemy's strength there; for on the night of the 20th everyone had full confidence in the reports of the spies and believed the enemy was coming on in force. Well, on the 21st we got away about 4.30 a.m., marched to Abadar (some twelve miles) where is a Jaalin post holding a block house. Here the whole halted except 2 squadrons. One under Le Gallais, and accompanied by me as a sort of odd man, was ordered to reconnoitre Umbadia from the right bank. Another squadron (accompanied by Mahon) reconnoitred the left bank up to a point opposite Umbadia. Le Gallais and I proceeded for some 7 or 8 miles. He halted the mass of the squadron about a mile clear of the scrub and then he and I went on with a small patrol. When just north of the thick scrub near Mutrus we saw a single Dervish scout, but only for a second, as he vanished at once. We went after him a short way, but as we had already proceeded farther than ordered, we returned through the scrub and the deserted villages along the river bank. We

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got back to Abadar about 1.45 p.m. I had watered my horse and was still in the river bed, when I heard the order to turn out as the Dervishes were on us. Briefly what had happened was this: The single scout had collected some hundred or more mounted men and followed Le Gallais and myself back to the halting place. They were met by a patrol from the outposts, which they raced back and reached the picket simultaneously. The picket was dismounted; several men composing it were shot or speared; and the leaders of the Dervishes were then close to the main body. This was fairly alert and prepared, having watered only by troops. One squadron which was ready saddled up was ordered forward, and in a short time, probably 3 minutes at most, 4 others were in support. The leading squadron was commanded by Persse (Queen's Bays). He was ordered to clear the scrub, for as yet only some half-dozen Dervishes had shown themselves to the main body. Having advanced into the scrub his pace was reduced to a trot or walk owing to the broken ground and bushes which are thick here. There he was met by some 50 or more mounted enemy. Under the circumstances he thought he could not go on, so tried to draw off. At this moment he lost 7 or 8 men, shot from behind trees mostly. A number of Dervishes tried also to work along the river bank, but the squadron returning from the left bank frightened them off. We pursued to near Mutrus and located the enemy (merely cavalry) at Nakheila. It was 11.30 p.m. when we got back to bivouac. Our losses were 8 killed and 10 wounded (2 of the latter died on way to Camp) and 13 horses. The enemy lost some 6 or 7 only, and we got 4 horses. My comment on this action is

1. The outpost service, tho' *theoretically* right, was carelessly done. When I passed the picket in question, many were lying down apparently asleep.

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2. The eyesight of the Egyptian vedette can't be relied on. For the Dervishes passed the front of the line of vedettes!

3. The pluck of the Egyptian Cavalryman is right enough in my opinion.

4. The Horse Artillery against enemy of this sort and in scrub is no use. We felt the want of machine guns when working along outside of scrub for searching some of the tracks."

It is interesting to find that Haig should have been so ready to learn new lessons from his first experience of fighting, and it is worth noting that he realised the importance of machine guns so early as 1898.

A fortnight later he was again in action, and the following is the account which he sent to his sister:

"On Tuesday, April 5th, the Cavalry Brigade with a Horse Artillery Battalion and 2 Maxim Batteries and Company Camel Corps started as soon as it was light (5 a.m.) to reconnoitre the Dervish camp again. This time for the benefit of the General Officers. Unfortunately, or at least contrary to expectation, 3 out of the 4 Brigadiers were unable to come—Gatacre was ill, so was Macdonald, and Lewis was on duty. Maxwell was the only one who came, along with General Hunter, who commands all the Egyptian forces here, and is a first-rate fellow, I think. There were a few other hangers-on as well, who came on some pretence or other. But the management of the whole force rested with Broadwood, of course, Commanding Cavalry. We got opposite the Dervish dem (which I told you of in my last letter) and saw the same sort of movements as then, viz. a lot of dust in the dem, and clouds of horsemen moving away from it up and down stream. To make a long story short, we quickly and easily drove back the lot which came out towards us from up stream, and General Hunter was able to see all he wanted of the right of the enemy's

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position. He then said that he would like us to move so as to let him see the left. We therefore proceeded to retire towards the enemy's left. We had scarcely begun to do so when the horsemen which we had already repulsed advanced up a sort of dip in the ground and came round our flank from up stream. The Dervish infantry left their trenches and came at top speed towards us. And the cavalry which had gone down stream came directly across our line of retreat. The situation was a difficult one, and to add to it a strongish north wind prevented our seeing clearly the moment a squadron moved.

"I had just been to Baring to get him into a position on the right of the guns to cover them during our withdrawal when I noticed our left rear (Le Gallais) attacked. Broadwood was at (A) on the left of guns retiring at a trot. I galloped to him and told him the left rear was strongly attacked. He could not see this from where he was because of the dust. Broadwood attacked with the 2 squadrons (Le Gallais), and fortunately the enemy (infantry and cavalry mingled) gave way before us. As we advanced B. gave me the order to see to the safety of the guns, which meanwhile were trotting gaily on to the rear. Mahon was halted waiting for guns to pass, so as to get into formation ordered for retirement.

"He could not see anything for dust. I told him that 2 squadrons (Le Gallais) were attacking, and asked him what he was going to do, so that I might get remainder of Brigade to conform. Mahon is a sound fellow, and said, 'I can't see what has happened, what do you suggest?' I at once said, 'Place one squadron on flank (i.e. west) of guns and support Le Gallais with your other two on *his* left. I will then bring Baring and remaining 3 squadrons on your left rear as a third line.' Mahon advanced. I gave Baring his orders, putting all 3 squadrons under him. I then galloped



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on to find Broadwood (who I knew must be with Le Gallais' squadrons) in order to know his wishes as to the action of the guns. On my way I found the 2 squadrons coming back at full gallop. We were able to stop them (the horses were pretty well beat), and they advanced a little way. I thought there was no time to lose to ask for orders, so I went direct to the maxims and told them they must come into action against the most threatening of the enemy (which I indicated) as soon as the cavalry cleared their field of fire. I then went off to Broadwood (who was still in front) to get him to lead the cavalry to a flank. I met him coming back with Mahon's squadrons, which were now pretty unsteady—as well they might be, for the infantry was round their flank and only 500 yards off and firing like blazes. Broadwood at once led off the cavalry to the flank and the maxims were able to open fire. This saved us for the moment, and the squadron again being steadied, we were able to fight our way out of the reach of infantry fire. Had the Dervish horsemen been all the papers say of them, we would never have got away. Fortunately they ran away the moment we showed a bold front, and only came on when we turned our backs. Our casualties were pretty severe, 30 and 10 killed. We had over 20 horses shot and many wounded. The cavalry did very well, I think, and the Sirdar came out and met the squadrons as they returned, and complimented some of them. This I hear is the *first time* the Gyppe Cavalry has ever had anything in the way of fighting to do. This accounts for the delight at Headquarters at discovering that they don't run away. Broadwood was much obliged to me for my assistance, and told the Sirdar so. He, Broadwood, was wrong to charge as he did with the first line, for the whole Brigade then passed from his control. But he is a very sound fellow, and is excellent at running this show."



HAIG IN 1894, FROM A WATER-COLOUR  
PAINTED BY MRS. GRAHAM-SMITH



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This was Haig's first opportunity of proving that he could keep his head in action, form a swift appreciation of a situation, and take the responsibility of giving the necessary orders. As a result Broadwood recommended him to Kitchener, and he received a brevet majority.

On April 8th there took place what was known as the battle of the Atbara, when after much hesitation Kitchener finally decided to attack the forces of the Khalifa's subordinate Mahmud, which he successfully defeated. The cavalry played but a small part in the engagement, of which it is therefore unnecessary to give a full account.

Writing to Sir Evelyn Wood on April 29th, Haig commented on the accounts of the battle that had appeared in the English press:

"We have just received the London papers of 9th April with accounts of the Battle of the Atbara. What rubbish the British public delights to read. The exaggeration of some of the reports almost makes a good day's work appear ridiculous. The headings of the *D.T.* are so overdrawn that instinctively one says, 'Waterloo Eclipsed'. But the story of Mahmud the Commander-in-Chief being taken 'under his bed' rather gives the show away! As a matter of fact he was taken in a kind of reduit with a gallery. Here his bodyguard fought hard, and were all killed except one. The latter, I am told, came out shouting, 'Don't shoot. Here is Mahmud.' So he got off with his life. The 11th Sudanese came across this sort of keep after entering the dem, and had the best part of a company shot down opposite it. Their casualties were over 100 on this account. By this time, however, you will have had an official account of the battle with plans, etc. I wonder what your opinion of the whole thing is. I had a good view of what took place, because we Cavalry did all that the Sirdar would allow us to do, quite early; namely, we drove the enemy's cavalry

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across the river and halted on the bank. There are some points in the day's movements which seem to me interesting to discuss at a 'Pow-wow' just for the sake of instruction. For instance, Why was the attack frontal? It seemed to me, from the very first day that we reconnoitred the place, that an attack on the enemy's right offered great advantages. The enemy would have been forced to retreat across the open desert to the Nile without being allowed time to fill waterskins, &c. for the march. What actually happened was that we drove the enemy from the right bank. He easily crossed the sandy bed of the river and retired *up* the left bank. There is a belt of scrub and palms of about 2 miles wide on left bank opposite the dem. While on right bank it averages about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile only. Now it seems to me that there would have been little or no risk (had we attacked enemy's right) in sending a Brigade across the river bed with all the cavalry and some guns. I am aware that to reach the enemy's right we must have made a flank march in front of an enemy 'in position'. But it would have been to our advantage had he left his trenches and attacked us during the movement. Next, what about the use made of the artillery? Distant fire was not required; in fact, the 1st and only range was some 700 yards. Our side says the guns did tremendous damage. Mahmud and over 300 (enemy) questioned by Fitton (who is a sort of intelligence officer here) say, 'We did not mind the guns, they only hurt camels and donkeys. The infantry fire was what destroyed us.' As far as I can make out, the artillery preparation frightened a good many of the spearsmen, and they bolted. The deep nature of the trenches prevented shrapnel searching it. It was interesting to see an old camel during the artillery bombardment, hopping about in and out of the weak places of the zariba. This was nothing of an obstacle, and there were many roads through it. Another

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point is the formation of the force for the attack. Each Brigade attacked on a front of about 300 to 400 yards. (For a straight line of 1000 yards would more than reach from the enemy's right to his left.) So looking on, it struck me that our formation was extraordinarily deep. This may have accounted for our severe losses. Egyptians had 483 casualties; British 120—603. I see in the whole of the Tirah operations the losses are 1050. (My Egyptian figures are correct, for the hospital is next door here and the 2 doctors live in our mess.) Briefly, my plan of attack would have been to have established as many infantry as the frontage admitted, in a fire position as quickly as possible. The dem being at the foot of the slope (400 yards from crest on average), the ground lent itself to this. Moreover, it was possible from more than one place to enfilade the front trench with machine guns. Two Brigades would have more than sufficed for this. A third Brigade, guns and cavalry to have destroyed the fugitives *in* the river bed (600 yards wide or more), in the scrub beyond, and in the desert. The 4th Brigade as a reserve. The weak point in my plan is that I calculated as if I had troops that can shoot and manoeuvre. It would be unwise to rely upon the Blacks doing either *well*. So all the more credit is due to the Sirdar for limiting himself to a moderate victory instead of going for annihilating Mahmud's army."

After the Battle of the Atbara there was a pause of some five months in military operations while everything was prepared for the final blow. Many officers availed themselves of the opportunity to take leave to Cairo or Alexandria, but Haig preferred to remain at his post. The pleasures that such places had to offer did not tempt him, and he was particularly anxious to head the list of those who would be entitled to leave on the close of the campaign. Sir Evelyn Wood had promised to find a post for

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him in London, and he did not wish, as soon as the fighting should be finished, to spend any further time in Egypt.

Haig was not the only officer who owed his presence in Egypt to the assistance of Sir Evelyn Wood. A younger and less distinguished cavalryman had made use of the same channel to overcome the determined opposition of the Sirdar himself. On July 12th Kitchener confided to Haig "that he was much bothered by people with influence forcing useless officers on him. Asked if I thought young Churchill<sup>1</sup> suitable, I said I did not want him in my squadron." Yet this same young Churchill was to write an account of the River War which will be read when most of those who fought in it are forgotten. But commanders-in-chief can hardly be expected to take into consideration the literary talents of cavalry subalterns.

By the end of August preparations for the final stage of the campaign were completed and the advance on Omdurman was begun. Of the battle that took place there on September 2nd it is not proposed to give a detailed account. It must not, however, be supposed that it was either so simple or so certain a victory as it is sometimes represented. The Dervishes possessed an enormous superiority in number, their courage was fanatical, and a very large number of them were well armed. There were anxious, if not critical, moments in the course of the day. The Egyptian cavalry, with which Haig was serving as Staff Officer to Colonel Broadwood, bore the brunt of the first attack. They were on the extreme right of the Sirdar's army and Kitchener, seeing that they were hard pressed, sent them instructions to withdraw towards the centre and behind the infantry on their left. Rawlinson was the name of the A.D.C. who carried the message, and he wrote an account of the scene a few days later: "At length we could see our contact

<sup>1</sup> The Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill.

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squadrons under Douglas Haig gradually withdrawing as the Dervishes advanced. . . . I rode out to him over the ground which an hour later was heaped with dead and wounded Dervishes. When I reached him he was within about six hundred yards of the enemy's long line, and I noticed that his confident bearing seemed to have inspired his fellahcen, who were watching the Dervish advance quite calmly."

Broadwood, however, preferred to retire due north, drawing the enemy after him, who were thus induced to waste their main attack in fruitless pursuit instead of concentrating it upon the main body of the Anglo-Egyptian force. In executing this strategic retreat, Broadwood did not hesitate to abandon two guns to the enemy, who were so encouraged by their apparent success that they lost precious time and incurred serious casualties in pursuing the elusive cavalry for more than three miles to the north, away from the field of battle. "The cavalry", in the words of the author of *The River War*, "played with their powerful antagonist as the banderillo teases the bull." The same author attributes the final success of the day very largely to Broadwood's initiative, and Haig as his *Staff Officer* is therefore entitled to a share of it.

The completeness of Kitchener's triumph was marred by his failure to capture the Khalifa. How when it was too late he attempted to rectify this error and the hardship imposed on the Egyptian cavalry as the result, may be told in Haig's own words:

"We got to the river near the mouth of Khor Shambat about 3 p.m. all worn out. After, we got orders to move, as we thought into camp, so no water bottles had been filled. Instead of camping we were led west of the city from which, away to the south, immense crowds could be seen escaping. Halting opposite the West Gate, Slatin joined us



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full of excitement, and he said he had orders for us to 'pursue at once'. The Sirdar actually had entered the mosque before the Khalifa had left it! I won't tire you with an account of our sufferings during this pursuit, sufferings which half an hour's forethought and preparation would have prevented. Our men and horses had rations till next morning, and it was intended we should draw for the supplies from a steamer. The high Nile prevented the steamer getting within 300 yards of the shore in the first instance, and then prevented us reaching the bank in the second. The country south of this at present is swampy. I need not enlarge on the difficulties we had in crossing this in the dark, with dead-beat horses, and the discomfort of 2 nights spent in such country with very little food and no drink for man or beast. We got back here on the 4th."

This account forms part of a long letter to Sir Evelyn Wood which, together with one to his sister, was borne by "young Churchill who is going north by steamer today" (September 9th), and who had himself taken an active part in the battle.

Haig's final conclusions were as follows:

"... and now one word on the Battle as a whole. I had ample time to 'appreciate' the situation on the 1st and 2nd morning. The enemy halting as he did on the upper pools on the Khor Shambat on night 1-2 Sept. abandoned the key of the position, Signal Hill, to the Sirdar. The latter hill has long sloping shoulders, and to my mind should have been occupied on evening of 1st. Why should the enemy not have taken it? and what losses would we not have suffered in turning him out? Lastly, occupied and used as a pivot, and keeping our army concealed to the east of it with gunboats and heavy guns on position protecting the flanks, we could anticipate any move of the enemy. Then on morning of 2nd when the enemy had divided his forces,

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the Sirdar's left should have been thrown forward to this hill, and gradually drawing in his right and extending his left south-westwards, he might have cut the enemy off from Omdurman and really *annihilated* the thousands and thousands of Dervishes. In place of this, altho' in possession of full information, and able to see with his own eyes the whole field, he spreads out his force, thereby risking the destruction of a Brigade. He seems to have had no plan, or tactical idea, for beating the enemy beyond allowing the latter to attack the camp. This the Dervishes would not do in force, having a wholesome fear of gunboat fire. Having 6 Brigades, is it tactics to fight a very superior enemy with one of them and to keep the others beyond supporting distance? To me it seems truly fortunate that the *flower* of the Dervish army exhausted itself first in an attack and pursuit of the cavalry. Indeed the prisoners say, 'You would never have defeated us had you not *deceived* us.' "

That the Adjutant General should encourage a Cavalry Captain to send home outspoken criticisms of his Commander-in-Chief may surprise some readers who believe that the discipline of the parade ground pervades the whole direction of military affairs, and that in the Army there is no opening for talent, no welcome for originality, no appreciation of brains. It was certainly not so in the days of Sir Evelyn Wood, although we have often been asked to believe that those very days, which preceded the South African War, were the most stagnant and barren in our military history. .

## Chapter IV

### SOUTH AFRICA

A few days after the Battle of Omdurman Haig sent in his resignation from the Egyptian Army. It was accepted, and by the beginning of October he was once more at home. The 7th Hussars were now quartered at Norwich, and he spent the next six months either with his regiment or on leave. In May he was transferred to Aldershot, where he took over the duties of the Brigade Major of the 1st Cavalry Brigade and where he was to receive four months later his next summons to active service.

The River War, with all the expense and suffering that it entailed, was but part of the evil heritage which Mr. Gladstone bequeathed to his country. "So bad began, but worse remained behind." The same Government, that had failed to support and refused to avenge Gordon, had also concluded a humiliating peace with the South African Republic on the morrow of the British defeat at Majuba Hill, and in spite of an assurance from the General on the spot that he held the enemy in the hollow of his hand. The indignity with which British subjects were henceforth treated by the Government of the Transvaal is a proof of the contempt for Great Britain which such pusillanimous policy had bred in the minds of an intensely virile and courageous people, and explains the confidence in their ultimate victory with which the Boers entered on the South African War.

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Throughout the spring and summer of 1899 negotiations proceeded, and the prospects of peace grew fainter. On September 14th, at Aldershot, Haig received his instructions. He was to act as Chief Staff Officer to Sir John French, who had been selected to command the cavalry in Natal. They were both to embark for South Africa on September 23rd.

His sister Henrietta and John Vaughan, a brother officer in the 7th Hussars, and although ten years his junior already a close friend, came to see Haig off at Southampton. To his sister he wrote from the boat a few days later, with that characteristic suppression of feeling which is more self-revealing than pages of eloquence: "You and I always seem to be saying 'goodbye' to each other, and yet practice in this does not seem to make the process easier, but rather more trying. However, you must not allow yourself to feel low-spirited, but arrange to enjoy yourself in a quiet sort of way."

The boat was so crowded that Haig thought himself lucky to share a cabin with French on the top deck and to have access to the Captain's bath. Long sea voyages in the days before wireless, at a time when great events were taking place, with war and peace hanging in the balance, must have been tantalising in the extreme. We are not surprised, therefore, to read in his diary on their arrival at Capetown: "Great excitement as to what the news is." It was the 10th of October, the eve of the declaration of war. The town was full of rumours, but on the following day the text of the Boers' ultimatum was published.—"It is generally agreed", writes Haig, "that even Lord Salisbury cannot knuckle under to this last piece of Boer swagger and that consequently hostilities may be expected to begin at 5 p.m. today."

When the outbreak of war occurred on October 11th

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the Boers were ready to attack the British at any point along the vast frontier that divided their respective territories. In the extreme west they forthwith attempted to capture the important British towns of Mafeking and Kimberley, while in the extreme east on the farther side of the Orange Free State and the neutral territory of Basutoland they concentrated their principal offensive against the northern portion of Natal. Ladysmith was the principal town in that strip of territory which forms an exposed triangle with its apex in the Transvaal and its western side bordered by the Orange Free State; and here Sir George White was in command of the British forces.

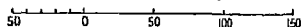
On the 14th French and his party of officers embarked once more on the *Norman*, on which they had travelled from England, and sailed for Durban, where they arrived on the 19th and taking the night train reached Ladysmith next morning.

They were immediately involved in active operations, being sent out the same morning to reconnoitre the Boers' position at Elands-laagte, where the enemy had stopped a train and broken the railway. They were warned, however, by Sir George White, not to advance too far, and they returned the same evening without having come into contact with the enemy.

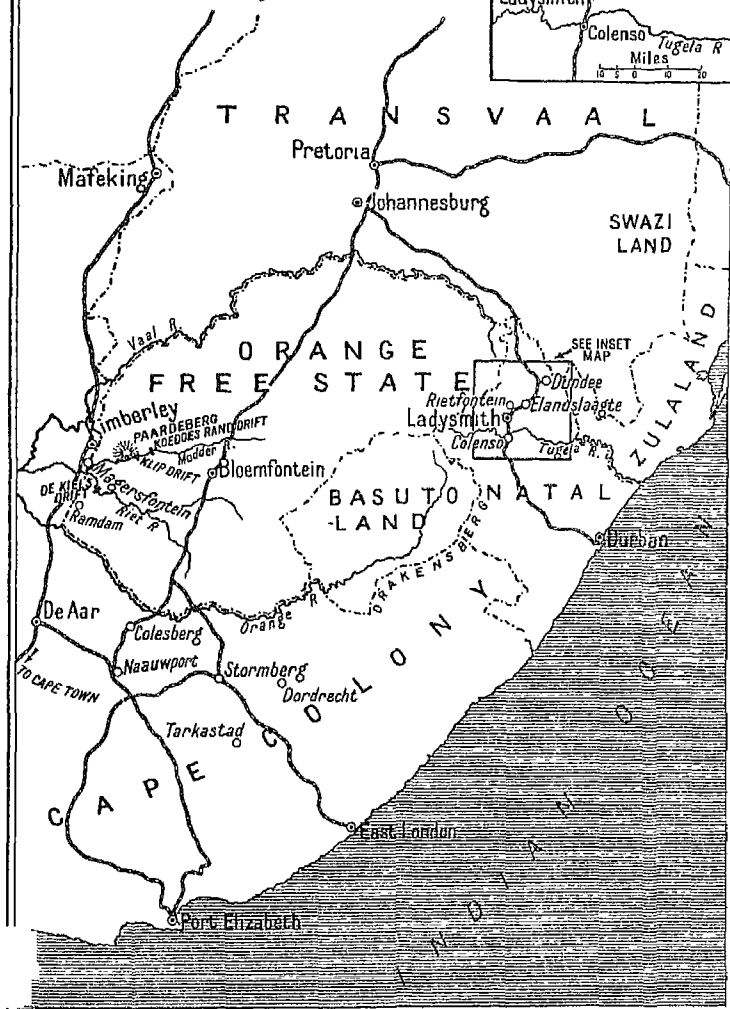
Haig dined that night with the Commander-in-Chief, but he had little time or attention to spare for dinner. At eight o'clock he received orders to leave at four the next morning in order to capture the Boer position at Elands-laagte. French was to be in command with Ian Hamilton under him, and upon Haig as Chief Staff Officer rested the responsibility of seeing that all the necessary orders were issued. There had been an important engagement the day before at Talana, but news of it had hardly yet reached Ladysmith. So far as most of those concerned were aware,

# SOUTH AFRICA

Scale of Miles



Main Railways





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this was to be the first serious action in the South African War, and much must depend upon the competence of the thirty-eight-year-old Major, who had never fought against a civilised enemy before.

It was raining at 4 a.m. when, on the anniversary of Trafalgar, the little force gathered at the *rendezvous*. Four squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse, half a battalion of the Manchester Regiment, and one battery of the Natal Artillery were all that composed it. Their instructions were to recapture the railway station of Elandslaagte, which was in the possession of the Boers, who were also occupying a strong position on the hills to the south of it.

As soon as the British force came within sight of their objective the seven-pounders of the Natal Artillery proceeded to shell the station, which the Boers hastily evacuated. Hardly, however, had they done so when the main Boer force, from their position on the hill, opened fire upon the attackers, and it soon became plain that their artillery outranged by over five hundred yards that of their opponents. The position was obviously more strongly held than had been anticipated and, in view of the new situation that had arisen, French withdrew his troops from the range of the enemy's fire, and decided to ask for further instructions by telephone from General Headquarters at Ladysmith. Haig thus explains the situation in the careful account that he kept of all that took place. "It appeared that the decision of fighting the enemy in a chosen position was one upon which the Commander-in-Chief alone could give an opinion. A defeat or victory must have important results on the campaign. It was for the Commander-in-Chief to decide whether either the political situation in South Africa or the military situation in Natal (which an officer commanding a detachment for a day could not thoroughly know) demanded that a battle should be risked."



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"The Commander-in-Chief decided without delay that the enemy must be attacked and driven out." Considerable reinforcements were hurried out from Ladysmith until the British had a superiority over their opponents both in men and in guns. The attack was resumed in the afternoon and, after what were in those days considered serious casualties, proved successful. By six o'clock the position was carried just as the light was beginning to fail. The victorious infantry slept on the battlefield, and the remainder of the force were concentrated on the railway station at the bottom of the hill.

At 9 p.m. the following message was received by telephone: "Sir G. White wishes the force now at Elandslaagte to return to Ladysmith as soon as possible. The repairing of line to be discontinued."

It must have seemed to many of those who had taken part in the battle that their efforts had been wasted when they were instructed to abandon the territory which had been so dearly won. But the object of Sir George White in giving battle had been to protect a column of troops under General Yule, which had given up their position at Dundee and were coming to join him at Ladysmith. A glance at the map will show the difficulty of his strategic position, situated as he was on a kind of northern peninsula of Natal, which jutted out, a dangerous triangle, into the hostile territory of the Orange Free State upon one side and the Transvaal on the other. As the position at Dundee was no longer tenable, it was of the first importance to secure the retreat of the troops upon which depended the successful concentration of the British forces. With the same object in view, another action was fought at Rietfontein on October 24th, in which, however, the cavalry took little part. It was largely an artillery duel designed to keep the Boers pinned to their position, and it was broken off as soon

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as Sir George White was satisfied that his intention had been accomplished.

It now became increasingly clear as the Boer commands swept down from the Transvaal and the Free State that Ladysmith would shortly be surrounded by the enemy. The battle of Lombard's Kop on October 30th, when the Gloucesters and the Irish Fusiliers were cut off at Nicholson's Nek and forced to surrender, did nothing to improve the situation.

On October 31st, General Sir Redvers Buller, to whom the command of all the troops in South Africa had been entrusted, arrived at Cape Town. He found himself faced by the unpleasant necessity of dividing his small force of one Army Corps into three parts. The serious character of the situation in Natal has already been described. Ladysmith lay on the extreme right of the far-flung line of battle. On the extreme left Mafeking and Kimberley were with difficulty holding out against superior numbers, while now the British centre was threatened by a powerful force collected in the Orange Free State, preparing to invade Cape Colony, where its advent would have been welcomed by a large number of the disaffected inhabitants. Buller accordingly despatched Methuen to the west to relieve Kimberley, sent Gatacre forward with a small contingent into Cape Colony, and himself accompanied the remainder of his forces into Natal to the relief of Ladysmith. Before doing so, however, he took one important step with a view to strengthening the resistance of his centre.

On November 2nd, General French with the cavalry executed a successful early morning raid on a Boer laager, surprising the enemy at their breakfast. Returning to Ladysmith at 11 a.m., French and his Chief of Staff learned that the following telegram had been received from Buller—

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"French should take command of Cavalry Division on its way from home, and it is my wish particularly that he and Haig should come here if you can spare them possibly."

There was no time to be lost. It was already doubtful whether a train would succeed in getting through the encircling troops of the enemy. At one o'clock in the afternoon they left—French and Haig with the former's two aides-de-camp, Laycock and Milbanke, seven servants and nine horses. There were no other passengers. The four officers occupied the one first-class compartment. As they had been impressed with the necessity of keeping out of sight for the first two hours of the journey, they were forced to lie on the seats and on the floor. It is odd, in the light of subsequent events, to picture the two Commanders-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force crouching on the floor of the little railway carriage in positions which could hardly be assumed with dignity and wondering, while the train staggered along under a hail of rifle and shell fire, whether at any moment they might not find themselves at the mercy of their enemy and condemned to spend the rest of the war in inglorious captivity at Pretoria. It was a close thing. Once the train stopped. "The door opened and we expected to see some Boers inviting us to descend. But we had got into one of our own posts, left to protect the line, and the individual who opened the door was a British officer."

When they eventually arrived at Colenso they discovered that a 3-inch shell had gone through one of the trucks and done some inconsiderable damage to Haig's luggage. "If it had hit a wheel, not to mention the engine boiler, we would certainly have been now on our way to Pretoria." It was the last train to leave Ladysmith. They reached Durban the next day and sailed on the morrow for Capetown.

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Of everything that had taken place, during those crowded days at Ladysmith, Haig kept a most careful record. Of every order that he sent out and, so far as possible, of every order received he retained a copy. These orders, together with a summary of the events of each day, carefully put together, with the original documents preserved when available, are bound together in four volumes, which for long were exhibited at the Staff College as models of what such things should be. For the professional soldier, anxious to study his profession, these volumes possess a lasting value, for although all the weapons of war change and are ever changing, the main principles remain the same. One of the first of these is that a soldier should be prepared to learn something new from every practical experience of warfare. Haig's experience of this war was, so far, limited to a fortnight, but although he had not much leisure at Cape Town nor interval for quiet thought—he had to share with French a bedroom at the Mount Nelson Hotel—he availed himself of such opportunity as existed for setting down on paper the lessons he had learned.

The notes which he made, only for his own benefit, will be found in full in Appendix B. As a cavalryman, it is not surprising that he was quick to note the increased importance of cavalry in this type of warfare and their increased efficiency if equipped with a modern weapon. He also insists that greater attention must be paid in future to the training of cavalry in musketry, that they must be encouraged to overcome difficulties in the nature of the territory in which they find themselves, and that officers must be reproved "when in broken ground they sit still and complain 'that they can do nothing in this damned country'".

To his sister he wrote: "The one thing required here is 'Cavalry'! I think the country ought to be alive now to the fact (which we have always pointed out) that we don't

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keep up enough of this arm in peace time. This Mounted Infantry craze is now I trust exploded. So far they have proved useless, and are not likely to be of use *until they learn to ride*. You had better not give these views to Sir Evelyn, for both he and Lord Wolsley are the parents of the Mounted Infantry."

After giving this extremely politic advice, it is interesting to find him writing a little later to the same correspondent: "I would disband the politicians for ten years. We would all be the better without them."

Ten busy days were spent at Cape Town, and then orders were received for French and Haig to take train to De Aar with the object of occupying Naauwport and then Colesberg, where an important Boer force of uncertain strength under Schoemann had recently arrived. The menace which this force presented to the British position was considerable. On the extreme right of the British line of attack was the army of which Sir Redvers Buller was about to take command himself, and which was attempting to relieve Ladysmith. On his left, but divided from him by Basutoland, the neutrality of which both belligerents respected, was the force under General Gatacre advancing from East London towards Stormberg. On the extreme left was Lord Methuen, charged with the duty of relieving Kimberley. If the Boers at this moment, or during the more critical weeks that followed, could have concentrated a sufficiently powerful force in the vicinity of Colesberg and have successfully advanced into Cape Colony, where they would have met with much support from the inhabitants, they would have broken the centre of the British attack, and have rendered the task of winning the war with a voluntary army almost insuperable.

"Tell French to maintain an active defence not running any risk"—and a little later: "Suggest to French that a

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policy of worry, without risking men, might have a good effect on the enemy at Colesberg and keep him occupied"—these two sentences contain the substance of Sir Redvers Buller's instructions. They were admirably carried out during the three months that followed. It would be tedious to describe in detail the minor operations that kept the enemy perpetually occupied, and that in this theatre of the war alone maintained undiminished the prestige of the British Army. When in that black week of December Gatacre was defeated at Stormberg, Methuen at Magersfontein and Buller at Colenso, the only name that remained associated with victory in the minds of the English people was the name of French. And the army knew that Haig was at French's elbow. Nor was the General himself ungenerous of praise. In his despatch of February 2nd, describing these operations, he wrote: "Major D. Haig, Acting Assistant Adjutant General and Chief Staff Officer, has shown throughout the same zeal, untiring energy, and consummate ability as have characterised his conduct and bearing since the very commencement of the campaign (in Natal) during the whole of which time he has acted in this capacity. I have had occasion to speak of him in a similar sense in former despatches."

The military disasters which have been mentioned had aroused in the people and Government of Great Britain the determination to make further efforts. To Lord Roberts, who was then commanding in Ireland, was handed over the supreme command in South Africa, and Lord Kitchener, who was still in the Soudan completing his work of the previous year, was appointed Chief of Staff.

Meanwhile the dawn of the twentieth century broke red and threatening for the British Empire. While her two greatest Generals were in mid ocean, her three defeated armies licking their wounds, the Great Powers of the world,

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among whom Great Britain counted not a single ally nor a single friend, stood expectantly round the arena watching with undisguised delight the fierce mauling to which the old lion was being subjected by the claws of so diminutive an antagonist.

At one spot only in the broad British dominions there seemed a ray of hope. French had planned a night attack upon one of the hills south of Colesberg for the 31st of December. He had previously, together with his Chief of Staff, made a close reconnaissance of the enemy's position, the necessary orders had been given, every eventuality had been foreseen, with the result that, in the words of the official historian, "the enemy's piquet fled and the Royal Berkshire, just as day dawned on January 1st, 1900, gained without opposition the crest of the hill, henceforward to be known as McCracken's Hill".

All through January French successfully maintained his position and brought to nought the efforts of Schoemann, who was naturally anxious to emulate the triumphs of Cronje and of Botha. It was to French, therefore, that the minds of Roberts and of Kitchener inevitably turned when they sought for a leader to carry out the plan of campaign upon which they had decided. They had determined to abandon the original design of advancing along three or four separate lines on a broad front, and, instead, to turn the enemy's right flank by getting round him in the west and making straight for the beleaguered city of Kimberley.

Every effort was made to deceive the enemy as to our intentions. The secret was so closely and so successfully kept that very few even of those in the highest positions were aware of it. French himself was only informed when he happened to visit Cape Town at the end of January. He had perhaps gone there to register a final protest against the decision which had been taken by the higher authorities to



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replace his Chief of Staff by Lord Erroll, who was a full Colonel, but who had only just arrived from England, and therefore could know nothing whatever either of the conditions of war in South Africa, or of the qualities of the various regiments and officers of which the Cavalry Division was to be formed.

French telegraphed to the Chief of Staff on January 18th, "May I point out that appointment of A.A.G. to Cavalry Division was promised by Sir Redvers Buller to Major Haig with local rank of Lieutenant Colonel. . . . I earnestly beg that Field Marshal will be pleased to confirm this. Major Haig has performed duty of Chief Staff Officer to a division since landing in Natal. He has acted in this capacity under my command in three general engagements and many smaller fights. I have several times mentioned him in despatches. His services have been invaluable."

The answer came, "Field Marshal Commander-in-Chief fully realises the very excellent services rendered by Major Haig and much regrets not being able to meet your views as regards his taking position of A.A.G. of the Cavalry Division. That position, however, the Field Marshal thinks must be filled by the appointment of a senior officer, and he feels sure you will find Colonel the Earl of Erroll an efficient officer."

When Haig paid a visit to Cape Town at the beginning of February, he wrote to his sister, "Everyone here condoles with me at being superseded by Erroll, so I expect the Field Marshal has discovered that he has done the wrong thing. As a matter of fact I think less about this appointment than my friends. But, of course, it is gratifying to find one's work has been appreciated in the Division."

It was as D.A.A.G., therefore, that Haig took part in the relief of Kimberley, but whatever his official post he remained in fact the right-hand man of General French, who

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scored upon this occasion one of the most outstanding successes of the war. The following account of that famous ride was sent by Haig to Colonel Lonsdale Hale a few days later:

"You will have seen many accounts in the papers of how the cavalry relieved Kimberley, and then moved to head Cronje, and enabled the infantry to come up: but possibly a line from me on the subject may please you, and enable you to correct the gossiping tales that are sure to result from all the hearsay evidence of the correspondents: for not one really rode all the way with us. We left Modder River on Sunday 11th Feb., rather a scratch pack. Not a single Brigadier for the 3 Brigades. Gordon joined after we marched—Broadwood at Ramdam about 10 p.m.—Porter (after we had forced the Modder) not till 14th. All the Brigade staffs were also new.—We marched at 3 a.m., and having taken the precaution of sending our baggage and supply column beyond the outposts (Methuen) on the previous evening, we got all away southwards out of sight of Boer position of Magersfontein before daylight.—We halted at Ramdam Sunday night. At this point we had 2564 cavalry which we brought from Modder and 7 Batteries R.H.A. We now were joined by 550 Roberts' Horse, 155 K.'s Horse and 562 M.I. under Alderson.—We had been told that we would have 8500 horsemen on this night. Kitchener at Modder impressed me with the importance of our mission, said, 'if it failed neither he nor the F.M. could tell what the result on the *Empire* might be.'—There was no good waiting, so French decided to push on next morning as all depended on surprise. We marched at 2 a.m. on Monday 12th as long as there was a moon. Luck and the ground enabled us to get our many odds and ends away from camp in 3 groups without a hitch. When the moon went down we halted till morning, then pushed on to the

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Reit river. We threatened it in 3 places and got across at De Kiel's Drift with the loss of a few men and poor Majendie. Had a very hot day and it was about 3 p.m. before we got firmly established. But we did not get our baggage till next morning. We left our baggage at Ramdam till we knew whereabouts we could cross the Reit. Tucker's Division also camped at Ramdam. He marched about 7 a.m. and brought on all his bullock transport, passing it in front of ours. So that at 8 a.m., when I sent for our transport, it could not move, and did not get away till 5 p.m. Tucker arrived at the Drift (a very steep and bad one) at De Kiel's. We had arranged to keep well back from the river bank so as to let waggons have a clear run: but Tucker's people coming up jostled and crowded till the drift got into an indescribable state of block. I mention this to show you the want of a Commander-in-Chief when there are 2 independent Divisions. Our supplies got up next day Tuesday 13th in time to enable us to fill our nose bags and start at 10.30 a.m. We took no waggons except 4 ambulances with us and a cablecart. The country was open and we advanced in line of Brigade masses, and then opened out to Square Column more or less—for we were sniped at from positions in our flanks, and had to detach squadrons to turn them. This was again a very hot day, and several heath fires sprung up and burnt our cable. About 2 o'clock about 1000 to 2000 Boers occupied a farm and hill on our right flank, and gave us some little trouble, but we took them in satisfactorily. We left the 1st Brigade to play with the Boers and pushed the other 2 quickly for the Drifts which were about 8 miles off. . . . The Cavalry arrived alone at the drifts, the R.H.A. could not keep up. The 12th Lancers attacked Klip Drift, dismounted and pushed across and held the koppies beyond, which formed a sort of natural bridgehead.—The Boers were

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completely surprised. We got all their supplies, hot bread and fruit sent up by the friends of the Boers in Magerfontein.—On Wednesday 14th we halted, for we had no supplies except what we carried in our wallets. The Transport arrived about 2 a.m. on Thursday 15th. We handed over our position to Kelly-Kenny's Division and marched at 9.30 a.m. carrying 2 days' supplies on the horses: leaving behind the ammunition columns and using the spare horses to horse the Batteries. Porter had now joined us and our strength all told including R.H.A. was 4890 horses—somewhat short of the promised 8500! However, we Cavalry must not complain, for Kitchener has backed us up well, and is really the working man of the Obercommando.—We had not gone 3 miles from Klip Drift northwards before our advanced squadrons were heavily fired on from some hills in their front—at the same time some Boer guns opened on us from a hill to our left (i.e. N.W.). The situation seemed to me to be that our friends of 2 days ago were holding the hills in our front to stop us going towards Bloemfontein, while Cronje from Magerfontein had extended his left to prevent us outflanking him. . . . There was an open plain towards Abous Dam between the 2 parties of the enemy. The ground rose from the river, so we could not see whether there were wire fences or not, but there seemed to be only a few Boers at the end of the rise.—There seemed only one thing to be done if we were to get to Kimberley before the Boers barred our path, namely charge through the gap between the 2 positions. Half our guns were ordered to keep down the fire from the koppies in our front (which would be on the right flank of the charging cavalry) and half engaged the enemy's guns. The 9th and 16th Lancers were then ordered to charge, followed by Broadwood's Brigade in support. For a minute it looked in the dust as if some of our men

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were coming back, but they were only extending towards a flank. Porter's Brigade followed with the M.I. and brought on the guns. Our Lancers caught several Boers and rode down many others in the open plain, and really suffered little from the very hot rifle fire—about 20 casualties I fancy—and we passed within 1000 yards of the Boer position!—We got to Kimberley about 6 p.m. The garrison made not the slightest attempt to assist us. Alone we cleared all the Boers' investing positions in the south and took two laagers. The people in Kimberley looked fat and well. It was the relieving force which needed food! For in the gallop many nosebags were lost and 7 lb. tins of bully beef are an unsuitable adjunct to one's saddle in a charge."

On the 22nd of February, Haig wrote to his sister: "I was appointed Lt. Colonel last night and today take over command of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade. . . . It is a great piece of good luck being given the command of this Brigade, for of course we have any number of old fossils about—full Colonels, etc. Kitchener has supported us Cavalry well and French has quite a free hand now. I think you will agree with me that I have not been mistaken as to the power of cavalry when led with determination even in spite of modern guns." But before closing the letter he wrote as a postscript: "Since writing above I have been appointed Chief Staff Officer of the Division (that is A.A.G.), Lord Erroll being moved to Roberts' staff as Staff Officer for Mounted Infantry. This will suit me very well."

The relief of Kimberley was followed by the surrender of Cronje at Paardeberg on February 29th, and the almost simultaneous relief of Ladysmith. Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, was taken in March, and thence Haig wrote to his sister on the 16th of that month: "We (the Cavalry) got in here last Tuesday the 13th. I'll send you an account of our movements in a day or two, but to-

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day I must limit myself to a line to catch this afternoon's mail which I hear is to go *by train!* . . . I wrote to you last from Koedoes Rand Drift. We left there on the 6th and halted at a place south of the river Modder some few miles to our right rear. Next morning (Wednesday 7th March) we marched at 3 a.m. and moved round the left or southern flank of the Boer position which they had been strengthening with entrenchments for some days. We got completely round the enemy and quite surprised them. The Boers left their trenches and some took up new positions to try and check our advance. We lost fairly heavily in turning some Boers out of a farm and off a ridge; but nothing of course compared to what infantry would have suffered had they tried to dislodge the Boers by an attack on the position. Our casualties were about 50 or 60 of whom 7 or 8 were killed. Old Kruger and Steyn were amongst those who ran away! We hear now that Kruger had fixed a meeting for 9 a.m. on that day. He of course had to go off before the meeting took place. I well remember seeing a light 4-wheeled waggon drawn by 6 horses making off and our guns shelled it. One shell fell very close and the driver (who lives in Bloemfontein) says he never drove so fast in his life before! We did not know of course that Kruger was in the waggon, otherwise his capture would have been worth a lot of horses' lives. I have never seen horses so beat as ours on that day. They had been having only 8 lb. of oats a day and practically been starving since we left Modder River on Feb. 11th. So many Colonial Skallywag Corps have been raised that the horses of the whole force could not have a full ration. The Colonial Corps raised in Cape Colony are quite useless, so are the recently raised Mounted Infantry. They can't ride, and know nothing about their duties as mounted men. You will thus see that the success of the Cavalry Division has been in spite of difficulties, and

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notwithstanding short rations. But I have not finished my story about old Kruger. He hurried back here, ordered a special at once, and then went off 10 minutes before the hour arranged for starting! There was no speech and no reference to the "Triumite God'."

The relief of Mafeking took place in May, and when in June Pretoria was captured many people believed that the war was over. It had still two years to run. Officers, however, began to think of their futures, and in August Haig wrote from Middelburg: "By the way, French had a letter from Evelyn Wood this morning about me, stating briefly that the Cavalry had not done well in this campaign except under French, and suggesting that the cause was a difficulty in Cavalry leaders. So in his opinion it was to the interests of the service to put me soon in command of a regiment and he directs him to take what action he (French) thinks fit in the matter. French is replying that I had once been appointed to a Brigade, and that I might now be in command of one were it not to the interests of the service that I should remain on in my present billet. My present appointment of Chief Staff Officer of a Cavalry Division of 4 Cavalry Brigades is superior to any regimental appointment. . . . French is anxious to have me made an A.D.C. to the Queen because that at once gives me the rank of a full Colonel. At present I am a Lieut. Colonel in South Africa. Personally I don't care much what happens to me in the way of reward, for I despise those who only work when they hope to get something in return! Many thanks for the shaving soap. It arrived at the right time. I always shave and I was getting a bit short. I hear our Staff is considered well dressed and clean; this has a good effect on all ranks. We are off tomorrow for a 3 days reconnaissance on the Komati River."

In the following month he wrote again: "Of course it is



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a necessary thing to command a regiment and I should like to do so if I was given command of a good one in a good station. French is only too anxious to help me on, but I think in remaining on as his Chief Staff Officer I did the best for the Cavalry Division, for him and for myself. One did not foresee this war lasting so long, otherwise I might have taken some skallywag corps or other. So don't make a fuss about my being now in the same position as I started in. Recollect also many have gone lower down. And as to rewards, if you only knew what duffers will get and do get H.M.'s decorations and are promoted, you would realise how little I value them. Everything comes in time, and decorations come in abundance with declining years and imbecility. No one yet on this Staff, fortunately, has got a decoration of any kind, otherwise we might have achieved disaster like the other *décorés*."

The last stages of the South African War make dull reading, and must have made dull fighting for those engaged in it. Guerrilla warfare is from the point of view of the bigger battalions as tedious as it is inglorious. The rounding up of the elusive commandos proved a far longer business than anyone had anticipated. Early in 1901 Haig was given an independent command in Cape Colony, and had three, and later six columns under his orders. His difficulties were increased by the uncertainty as to who might be friend or foe. "It is more difficult", he wrote, "hunting the Boers in this Colony where all the farmers are secretly their friends, and the Government almost seem to assist the invader, than in the Free State or Transvaal where we can treat everyone as the enemy. . . . My chief difficulty now is to find horses for the six columns under my command independently of the Remount Department. So I have people all over the Colony commandeering what horses they can find. . . . I am having the inmates of each farmhouse registered and a

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ticket pasted on the front door giving a description of each man. Then our patrols pay surprise visits at night and arrest anyone not on the list and note the absentees as rebels. We have already caught several in this way."

One of the regiments serving under him was the 17th Lancers, of which he was at this time given the command. From henceforward the 17th Lancers remained his regiment, whose fortunes, whether he was with them or not, he always followed with loyal and paternal care. It so happened that this regiment sustained one of the few comparatively serious reverses which befell the British Army in South Africa in the year 1901. The following is Haig's account of the incident:

"You will have heard ere this of the terrible losses C. squadron 17th Lancers sustained on Tuesday last. I trained the regiment from Stormberg to Tarkastad to head Smuts' Commando which had broken S.W. from near Dordrecht. The Squadron in question under a most capable officer (Sandeman) was holding a position about 14 miles from Tarkastad to prevent the enemy coming south. I was out with the squadron on the previous day (Monday) when it marched from Tarkastad. The weather for several days had been terribly wet. However it cleared for an hour about 3 o'clock and Sandeman lunched with me (off some of those nice tin things you sent me from Cobbett) on the fatal koppie on which next day so many poor fellows were killed. I got back to Tarkastad at 9 p.m. Next morning was very foggy. However his patrols reconnoitred the two passes at the exits of which Sandeman had his camp. All was reported clear, but about noon message was sent to Sandeman that the Boers were advancing to attack his camp. A troop moved out at once. The officer in charge of it saw some men in khakee whom he took to be some of Gorringe's column which was expected north of the post.

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These men levelled their rifles at him when about 200 yards distant. He shouted to them 'Don't fire. We are 17th Lancers.' (These irregular corps often fire at one another by mistake.) The Boers, as such they proved to be, opened fire at once and emptied several saddles. Before the troop got back to camp the enemy had worked up a donga to the rear of the camp. Again their khakee dress assisted them. They were now between Sandeman's squadrons and another squadron which was about three miles distant. Seeing khakee dressed men in rear of camp, they were allowed to approach quite close before fire was opened on them. Our men held the position to the last, and not a man surrendered. Out of 130 men, 29 were killed and 41 wounded. The other men were still fighting when the next squadron came up to their support and the enemy made off. All the officers were either killed or wounded. Such nice fellows too."

His letters contain several references to misunderstandings which were already occurring between Lord Kit-chener and General French. "Lord K. seems to meddle rather," he writes in September, "and does not give French quite a free hand. Personally when I was in command directly under K. I did not find this the case. Indeed, I did just whatever I thought fit and never asked him what he wanted but merely told him what I had done."

That Haig's independence of mind and frankness of speech had been noticed, not without misgiving, in the highest quarters, is proved by the following extract from a letter to a friend written at about this time.

"You ask me too for my opinions on certain commanders and on their actions. Curiously enough Henrietta writes me a second edition of advice which the Prince of Wales was good enough to give to Willie Jameson for my benefit. The same advice was administered to me by Hol-

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ford after the Soudan campaign—namely, that I am too fond of criticising my superior officers. My ‘criticisms’ says H.R.H. ‘may be correct, but it does not do’. Now I never criticise people except privately, and what a stupid letter it would be if I did not express an opinion. Besides, I think we would have better generals in the higher ranks and the country would not have had to pass through such a period of anxiety had honest criticism, based on sound reasoning, been more general in reference to military affairs during the last twenty years. But whether I am right or wrong, I like to let my pen have a free run when I write to you, so I trust you won’t give me away and say I consider our worthy authorities are old stupid, ignorant even of the first principles of the game of war. Still I never go as far as that and make general statements of such a sweeping nature: I always give particular instances—chapter and verse in fact.”

Peace came at last, at the end of May in 1902. It seemed to Haig and to many another soldier, who had been fighting so long, that the terms were much too lenient and that the enemy should have been taught a sterner lesson. As usual on such occasions, the blame was vaguely cast upon the politicians by those who were ignorant of the true facts, and were unaware that it was the soldier, Lord Kitchener, who had firmly supported the generous terms that were offered to the enemy, whereas Lord Milner, the politician, had been in favour of severer measures.

The conclusion of peace did not mean the immediate return of Haig to England. He was given command of a large number of troops and placed in charge of a vast territory, “a triangle of about 600 miles each side which includes the main line from Capetown to Kimberley”. It was known as the Western Sub-district of Cape Colony, and it was his duty to secure the restoration of peaceful conditions and the maintenance of order.

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French left South Africa in June. The two soldiers, who had been through so much together, and for both of whom fate still held so much in store, took an affectionate farewell. "The little man", wrote Haig, "was almost in tears bidding goodbye, and I was sorry to part with him. He had a much warmer welcome from the people and soldiers on the ship than Lord K. French is most popular. By the way, when I come home there must be no nonsense—meet me just as you sent me away; no crowd of relations—just yourself and a friend."

Twice again in subsequent letters he reverts to this latter theme—"I suppose you will be back in England before then, but if you are not intending to be back so soon I trust you will not alter any of your plans on my account, because I dislike any fuss having reference to myself. So don't let on to anyone when I am likely to be back. They will see me quite soon enough." And once more, when he informs his sister of the ship on which he is sailing, he adds, "but I trust you will not make any fuss or put yourself or anyone else out in any way because of my arrival."

There is no false modesty in these injunctions contained in private letters which were never intended for other eyes than those of the woman to whom they were addressed, there is no mawkish desire to escape publicity, but only the genuine distaste of a reserved but sensitive man for anything in the nature of public acclamation.

During the year that had passed he had lost one relative, his brother Hugo, sixteen years his senior, whose son had been with the Cavalry in South Africa, and had also served on the staff. In a letter of advice to this young nephew, Haig revealed more of his deeper feelings than he was accustomed to do. "I think that you are quite right to let Ramornie for a period. It would be absurd for a lad of your years and without really any experience of the Em-

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pire and its inhabitants, to settle down into a turnip grower in Fife. Leave these pursuits until you get into the doddering age! Meantime do your best to become a worthy citizen of the Empire. *A propos* of this, I see rather a good book called *Tommy Cornstalk* by a man in the 1st Australian Horse (Abbott). They were attached to the Greys at the beginning of the war. Writing about outposts, he says '*Why did we ever come? We have dug latrines, and buried mules and made graves. We are crawling with vermin. We are tired, stiff and hungry, and we are going out on outpost! Why did we ever come? This isn't charging into battle, this isn't mowing thro' a flying foe, this isn't getting the V.C. Where is all the pomp and circumstance of war,*' etc. etc. . . . And then he answers '*Don't you really—deep down in your heart—consider that you are getting your reward? Isn't it something to be marching and fighting and starving with these Englishmen? Supposing that they are the scum of England—if they are—isn't it something for a one-horse volunteer crowd like you to be a squadron of such a regiment as the one you are with—a regiment which was fighting before there was an Australia, a regiment which saw Waterloo and Balaclava?*' etc. etc. '*Isn't that something, you discontented dog? Go, go out to your comfortless outpost. Have no supper. Make no fire. Just take your 2 hours' watch and your 4 hours' sleep in your lousy blanket and thank God that you are privileged to be here—yes, privileged—instead of reading about it in newspapers and books and not knowing,*' etc. . . . How would you now feel had you not been out here, had you not starved with the 'Old Colonel' and had your coffee when you got up, coffee for breakfast, for lunch, etc. etc., in fact, were not an officer in Her Majesty's 2nd Hussars? It has been your *good fortune* not only to become a soldier, but to have served and risked your life for the Empire—you must continue to do so, and consider that it is a privilege and not that by so doing you are losing time and money! Buy the

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book, and send me a copy, and possibly a word or two of Mr. Abbott's patriotism would not be wasted on some of your home-leafers, such as —— etc. He, and such like him need not join the Army in order to become a worthy citizen. He can help in other lines. Let him use some of his wealth in buying land in the newly acquired territory and send out settlers to ensure the unity of the country. There are a thousand other ways in which these idlers can become useful members of society, once they realise what rotters (from the point of view of British citizenship) they are in their present mode of living. The gist of the whole thing is that I am anxious not only that you should realise your duty to your family, your country and to Scotland, but also to the whole Empire—'Aim High' as the Book says, 'perchance ye may attain.' Aim at being worthy of the British Empire and possibly in the evening of your life you may be able to own to yourself that you are fit to settle down in Fife. At present you are not, so be active, and busy. Don't let the lives of mediocrities about you deflect you from your determination to belong to the few who can command or guide or benefit our great Empire. Believe me, the reservoir of such men is not boundless. As our Empire grows, so is there a greater demand for them, and it behoves everyone to do his little and try and qualify for as high a position as possible. It is not ambition. This is *duty*."

It was not until September that he sailed for England. Having left before the declaration of war, he did not return until after the conclusion and realisation of peace. He was not exaggerating his right to expect "a good spell of leave" when he wrote: "for three years straight away, on active service against a well-armed and active enemy like the Boers, entails a considerable amount of hard work upon all ranks and much anxiety at times upon those responsible

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for giving and transmitting orders. So though very fit and well I am anxious to do something else as a change."

In that war when so many reputations had been lost, his had been firmly established, and he came home at the age of forty-one with the certainty of a distinguished military career before him.



## Chapter V

### BETWEEN TWO WARS

Before Haig left South Africa he had been in communication with French as to the appointment that he was to take up on his return. French had been given the command at Aldershot, and he was anxious that Haig should join him and should command the Cavalry Brigade at that station. But French was not the only General who had been able in South Africa to form a just appreciation of Haig's qualities. Kitchener, who had become Commander-in-Chief in India, was equally determined to secure the services of the young Colonel. The post of Inspector General of Cavalry would soon fall vacant, and Kitchener was able to arrange that Haig should be reserved to fill it.

Haig's own attitude with regard to the two appointments was governed by the consideration as to where he could learn more and be of greater service, rather than by the thought of which would be the more agreeable. "French writes that Lord Kitchener is anxious for me to go to India as Inspector General of Cavalry when the present man's time is up, i.e., in a year and a half's time, but he (French) wishes me to get the Cavalry Brigade at Aldershot at once. I have written to him that I would prefer the Aldershot Brigade of course, but the other is a fine appointment too, with great opportunities of keeping one's hand in in handling mounted troops. In England I fancy these politicians will let everything slide as they did before the war.



HAIG IN THE UNIFORM OF COLONEL OF  
THE 17TH LANCERS



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However, I don't much mind which appointment I am given. . . . I see that you are anxious to address me as 'General'. Don't be in a hurry. The main thing is to have the men to command, no matter what they call one."

It was as Colonel that he came back from South Africa together with his regiment, the 17th Lancers, and Colonel he was to remain for many months. The regiment was ordered to Edinburgh, and it was pleasant for him to find himself once more in the city of his birth, the capital of the country he loved, and surrounded by the homes of his relations. But it was not with thoughts of his own convenience that his mind was occupied. To his sister he wrote, "Edinburgh is a bad place for cavalry"—underlining the words "no drill ground and half the regiment on detachment—so I wired to General French and asked him to try and get the station altered to York or Aldershot. Indeed, any place is better as a cavalry station than Edinburgh."

The protest proving ineffectual, to Edinburgh the regiment went, and for the next twelve months all their Colonel's energies were bent on improving their efficiency in every direction. Professional zeal does not always prove popular, and there were doubtless some in the regiment who believed that war should be followed by peace in the fullest meaning of the word, who had joined the army without any intention of taking it too seriously and who resented the methods of their Commanding Officer. But that this was not the attitude either of the keener or of the more intelligent is proved by the fact that during this period Haig, who did not make friends easily, made three among the younger officers who were to remain his intimates for the rest of his life—Alan Fletcher, Bertie Fisher and Osborne Beauclerk.

It was no easy life that these young officers were compelled to lead. Throughout his career Haig attached the

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greatest importance to physical fitness. While he was at Edinburgh every day of the week was fully occupied and on Sundays a regular routine was observed. It began with a three-mile drive in a fly from the barracks to Waverley Station, a half-hour journey to Drem and then a four-mile walk to the golf course of Muirfield. During the walk there and back and the two rounds of golf that were played, each man carried his own clubs, for local sabbatarianism forbade the employment of caddies. On these expeditions Haig always insisted on paying all expenses and when occasionally the others protested he would say that all that he asked of them was that they should do the same for their own junior officers when their turn came to command.

The admiration and affection that he inspired in these young men were not unmixed with awe, and none of them would have lightly refused the invitation to Sunday golf. But his contemporaries who had known him before the South African War found that his experiences there had produced a mellowing effect upon his character. Some of them had thought him before too utterly engrossed in his profession and too remote from human relationship. Henceforward he seemed to them to possess broader sympathies, to be easier of approach and more urbane in society. Whether the war had changed him or whether it was only that one of the veils of reserve, which cloaked his true nature, had fallen, must remain uncertain, but in either case the process was to continue.

In one department of his activities he was fortunate enough to see his efforts meet their reward. Polo was still his favourite game, and he excelled not only as a player but also in the different but equally difficult art of training a team. In the past the 7th Hussars had held a record in the military annals of the game, having won the Inter-Regi-

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mental Tournament seven times out of twenty-two, including the year 1899, since when, on account of the war, it had not taken place. But the gain of the 17th Lancers had been the loss of the 7th Hussars, and in 1903 the latter regiment, deprived of Douglas Haig, failed to distinguish themselves. The 17th, however, to the general surprise, defeated the Rifle Brigade in the semi-final. "When the last period of ten minutes began," according to *The Times* report, "the Brigade were two goals ahead but, playing up with great determination and excellent combination, their adversaries scored three times in rapid succession, and the match, which had seemed to be almost a certainty for the Rifle Brigade, resulted in favour of the 17th Lancers by seven goals to six. This was an unexpected conclusion."

They had now to meet the Blues in the final. The match was played at Hurlingham on July 11th. "The Blues started strong favourites, but they did not play up to their great reputation and the 17th Lancers, to the obvious gratification of the Duke of Cambridge, gained an unexpected but thoroughly well-deserved victory by five goals to one. The good defence of Colonel Haig, the brilliant cavalry officer who was chief of General French's staff during the late war, contributed in no small measure to their success.

"The Queen presented the cup to Colonel Haig and graciously shook hands with each member of the winning team and congratulated them on their victory. The cup was filled with champagne and each of the four winners in turn drank from it, after which the Duke of Cambridge lifted the huge trophy and drank their healths."

The Duke's satisfaction is explained by the fact that the 17th Lancers were the Duke of Cambridge's Own. He was eighty-four at the time, and this was the last tournament that he witnessed.

In attendance on Queen Alexandra that day as her Maid

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of Honour was Miss Dorothy Vivian, but she was not introduced to the captain of the winning team, although her brother, Lord Vivian, was an officer in the regiment.

That evening the defeated team entertained the victors at dinner. The meal, which took place at Regent's Park barracks, was not as cheerful as it should have been, for many friends who had been invited to celebrate the victory of the Blues thought it kinder to forget the engagement, and there was consequently the melancholy spectacle of empty places. The 17th Lancers, however, were determined to enjoy their evening and at the invitation of their Colonel, who as usual insisted upon bearing all expenses, repaired after dinner to supper at the Savoy. When, in accordance with the practice of that time, the lights were lowered and the guests were adjured to depart with the cry of "Time, please, gentlemen, time," the junior members of the team noticed with delight that nobody was more indignant or more vociferous in his protests than their Commanding Officer, who seemed on that evening at least to have enjoyed himself as much as the youngest of them.

The delay before taking up his next appointment proved shorter than Haig anticipated, and October of this same year saw him once more on his way to India as Inspector General of Cavalry. According to the contemporary press, "No case is recorded in the annals of the British Army in India of an officer being appointed to a post of such distinction and importance at anything like so early a period in his career."

Before sailing he was invited to Balmoral, where King Edward VII presented him with the C.V.O. in recognition of his services, and also as a "mark of personal esteem". His Majesty also gave him a walking-stick as a memento of the visit.

On arrival in India he proceeded straight to Simla where

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the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, and the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Kitchener, were both in residence. The divergence of view which was eventually to cause an open breach between these two remarkable men was already tending to bring about the creation of two camps. There could be no doubt with which cause Haig would sympathise in such a controversy. The dispute turned upon the position of the Military Member of Council, an officer inferior in rank to the Commander-in-Chief, but with power to override his decisions and to give military orders without his approval. The situation was admirably summed up in a letter from Haig to his sister:

"There was never any doubt about Kitchener coming as Commander-in-Chief, though I know he would much prefer a billet such as Cromer has in Egypt. The Commander-in-Chief in India really has very little power. All the supply, transport and finance are under an individual called the 'Military Member of Council'. That is to say that Lord Kitchener may order men to Tibet, but he does not know whether they will starve or not because he has nothing to do with the supply arrangements. Such a system is obviously ridiculous. It is like a pair of horses in double harness without a coachman."

The dispute, however, was for the time being in abeyance, partly owing to the fact that the two principal protagonists had become casualties. Lord Curzon had been kicked by a pony, and shortly after Haig's arrival Lord Kitchener was the victim of a more serious riding accident and broke two bones in his leg.

A few years earlier Haig had lent a considerable sum of money to a senior officer who would otherwise have been compelled to leave the service. He had done so, as he explained to his sister at the time, not only out of friendship for the officer concerned, but also in the belief that his



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retirement would be a loss to the army. Some difficulty had arisen about the repayment, and he learned that his trustees had been taking action in the matter. He immediately wrote to Mrs. Jameson, "I would prefer to lose the money rather than that General — should be pressed for it. . . . With my present pay I can live in luxury out here. I cannot stand the 'bunya' class. You know the bunya of course. How he sits round his bags of grain and flour and foodstuffs and ghee and, fat and greasy, gloats over every pice, and grinds the wretched tiller of the soil down by usury and close dealings."

A few months later he wrote again, "Please thank Percy" (an American friend, Percy Chubb) "for his kindly wishes 'to make a pile for me', but I believe I have as much money as is good for me. I have some good ponies and horses and enjoy myself pretty well without feeling the want of money. Too much luxury is ruining the country (I mean England), and also the Yankees!"

His work kept him fully occupied, and he was constantly moving from place to place. He would spend as a rule three days with each cavalry regiment and bivouac out with each for one night. The duty of inspecting is not always a grateful task, and the visit of an inspector is seldom welcome. He did his utmost to minimise irritation. "I am *most* considerate," he wrote, "as it is better to carry people with one than to stifle keenness by mere criticisms, without explaining what improvements and in what direction changes are required."

The enthusiasm with which he threw himself into this work communicated itself to others, and before he left India he was happy to notice a distinct improvement in the tactical ideas held by officers, which he knew was attributable to his training. He was a firm believer in the system of Staff Rides which had recently been introduced

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into India and which henceforth became an accepted method of training, and after his return to England he published under the title of *Cavalry Studies* accounts of the five Staff Rides carried out under his supervision, and of the experience gained by them.

This book, in which he was assisted by Colonel Lonsdale Hale, to whom he pays a generous tribute in the preface, should be read not only by every cavalry officer who wishes to understand his profession, but also by all who are interested in military problems. The method of the book is to describe each ride in detail from day to day, having first explained the scheme of the campaign, and to illustrate these descriptions by comparison with some similar operation in the past history of warfare. The intention is to combine theory with practice. "Certainly," he writes in the introduction, "a knowledge of military history is all-important to an officer. In studying it we see the great masters at work. We learn from their experience and become acquainted with the difficulties to be encountered in applying principles. But such work contributes little to developing our powers of decision. On the other hand 'War Games' and 'Staff Rides' should be framed chiefly with the latter object."

The pages that follow reveal deep study, wide reading and the clear thought that comes of prolonged reflection. He does not fall into the common error of judging military competence entirely by results. "The success," he writes, "which everywhere followed the Germans in the campaign of 1870, has blinded many soldiers to the errors which were often committed and passed unpunished." He criticises particularly the German use of their cavalry, which was all distributed in comparatively small contingents among the various Army Corps. There should have been an independent Cavalry body or reserve such as Napoleon always

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retained under his own command for special purposes. The Germans never learnt this lesson, and long afterwards it was Haig's opinion that, had they possessed sufficient available cavalry to follow up the pursuit in March 1918, events would have gone more hardly for the Allies.

In the light of what was to follow some of the principles insisted upon in *Cavalry Studies* are worth noting. "Napoleon's constant preoccupation, as must be that of every commander in the field, was how to reduce the number of troops employed on matters of secondary importance, in order to increase the numbers available for the decisive battle."

"Military history teaches us that the whole question of co-operation with an ally is fraught with difficulties and danger. When the theatre of operation lies in the country of the ally, these difficulties increase, for war can rarely benefit the inhabitants on the spot, and ill feeling is certain to arise."

Under the heading "Moral—the basis of success in War", he writes: "In discussing all these matters, we must not forget that we are dealing with men of flesh and blood and nerves," and he concludes the book with these words: "Lastly, it must also be fully recognised that no matter how keen or how highly educated in his profession an officer may be, he will not be able to get the best service from his troops in war unless he has also a knowledge of the human heart and understands the art of dealing with men."

What his views were at this time with regard to the future of European politics may be judged from a chaffing letter that he wrote to his sister, who had been travelling in a German ship:

"I see that you are still excusing yourself for assisting the enemy by travelling on the German subsidised mail boats,

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alias commerce destroyers. I am going to travel home by the Messageries Maritimes steamer leaving Bombay on 20th April (1905) because the P. & O. decline to give me a cabin to myself unless I pay an extra fare. The Messageries give me a 3-berth cabin for a single fare and £20 extra and a bathroom to myself. As the steamers leaving in April are so crowded, I shall be much better off in the French boat besides encouraging 'l'entente cordiale'."

It was on a French boat, therefore, that he sailed to England in April 1905. The visit was to prove an important one in his private life. He was now approaching the end of his forty-fourth year, and if he ever intended to marry the decision should not be much longer postponed.

From the time of their first meeting King Edward had been deeply interested in Haig's career, and when he heard that he was on leave in England he caused him to be invited to Windsor Castle for Ascot races. It so happened that the Maid of Honour who should have been in attendance on Queen Alexandra was unwell, and her place was therefore taken by Miss Dorothy Vivian.

The guests arrived on the Monday, but it was not until Thursday that Miss Vivian and General Haig were introduced. After the races Haig was to have played golf with the Prince of Wales, but owing to the Prince having been detained a foursome was made up in which Miss Vivian and Haig played as partners. He invited her to play again the next morning, which she did, spent most of his time at the races with her that day and took her in to dinner in the evening. The guests were to leave the Castle on Saturday morning, but Haig suggested to Miss Vivian that they should play another game of golf before he went.

When she met him, however, on the course next morning she was surprised to see him immediately dismiss the caddies and make it plain that he had no intention of

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playing. He suggested that they should sit down somewhere, but after a short search being unable to find a seat he blurted out "Then I must propose to you standing." The proposal was unexpected but it was not refused, and when the happy couple returned to the Castle the King and Queen were informed.

They were both delighted, but when the King congratulated Miss Vivian he spoke to her with great seriousness, and asked her to promise that she would do nothing to interfere with the military career of one whom he described as "my best and most capable general". Haig was asked to return to the Castle for the week-end, and on Monday he travelled to London with a letter from Queen Alexandra to introduce him to his future mother-in-law.

When a friend suggested to him that he had been somewhat hasty in taking such a momentous decision, he replied that he had often made up his mind about far more important matters in half the time.

The marriage took place in the private chapel at Buckingham Palace on July 11th. The honeymoon was spent at Radway Grange in Warwickshire, and at the end of August the bride and bridegroom returned to India.

Haig's last year as Inspector General of Cavalry was not eventful. The year 1905 saw the downfall of the long Conservative Administration, and one of the most remarkable of the new Government's appointments was that of Haldane to the post of Secretary of State for War. From the first this Scottish philosophical lawyer, who in appearance and manner was the antithesis of everything military, produced a favourable impression on the soldiers with whom he came into contact.

In February Haig wrote to his sister, "Everyone I hear from in the soldiering line at home speaks well of Haldane, so the advent of the Radicals is certainly of great advantage

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to the Army in substituting him for Arnold-Forster. French seems to like him very much and 'the Army Councillors', Hubert Hamilton writes me, 'have now the spirits of schoolboys home for the holidays.' "

Haig had friends at home who were determined that he should play his part in the reforms which the new Secretary of State was meditating. Lord Esher wrote to him, "There is only one change not yet made which Haldane *must* make. It is to put you in Hutchinson's place. I have never left him alone for a day since he took office on the subject. If *you* get back here in that place for two years the whole tone of army officers and their education will have undergone a change which will recast the army."

Haig's own feelings about the matter are described in another letter, dated April 3rd. "Doris and I go to our railway carriage tonight and start at 5 a.m. tomorrow en route for Mashobra. We are quite ready to start (for England) at the end of this month or not till July. Personally the life at Mashobra would be more agreeable for the summer than an office in Pall Mall. Still it is a very great honour to be sent for at this critical time to help to decide the future organisation of the Empire's forces. So I ought to be thought very lucky."

The post that was eventually found for him was that of Director of Military Training. "Although called 'Training', " he explained to his sister, "the Department also deals with War Organisation and Home Defence, so that it is the most important Directorate in the General Staff at the present time." It was still occupied when he was informed that he had been selected to fill it, and it would not fall vacant until the end of the summer. But the air of Pall Mall—for it was not until the following year that the War Office was transferred to Whitehall—was already electrified with schemes of reform, and the presence of Haig,

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already recognised as possessing one of the best brains in the Army, was urgently required. He was authorised, therefore, to return without further delay, and he arrived in London with his wife at the beginning of June.

The services which Haig rendered during the three years that followed were not particularly conspicuous to the public, but would suffice in themselves to entitle him to the lasting gratitude of his fellow countrymen. It was a period of preparation. At long last, and not too late, a Secretary of State had arrived at the War Office who was determined to prepare for war. The two principal difficulties that faced him were the objections of the powerful left wing of the Liberal party to any increase in expenditure on the forces, and the obscurantism of highly placed officers who hated the idea of reform. One of these remarked to General Sir Gerald Ellison, who had been appointed private secretary to Haldane, "If you organise the British Army, you'll ruin it."

Further evidence of the kind of opposition with which reformers were faced in these days is afforded by General De Pree, who writes:

"Haig did more than anyone else to save the newly made General Staff, which when he came back from India was in serious danger. The fight was finally won over the question of *Field Service Regulations*, Part II. This was a manual of the system of War Administration and Organisation, for which there was nothing laid down up to this time. Colonel Walter Adye in the Staff Duties Directorate had been working on it for years, but the Q.M.G., or someone, had always baulked its coming out. Haig determined to push it through, and put it down for discussion at the General Staff Conference at the Staff College in January. After much discussion one of the Members of the Army Council got up and in a most amusing speech poured ridicule on the whole thing. The assembly was greatly amused

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till Haig rose with a face of intense anger and, in a cutting voice said, 'If General —— will tell us what we ought to do instead of pulling everything to pieces, we shall get on much better. Let us have some system to start with, and if it is not perfect we can improve it.'

"General —— despite his seniority and high position made no rejoinder. The contrast between the fierce earnestness of D. H. and the jocular cynicism of the first speaker has left a lasting impression on my mind. After this there was very little opposition to the reforms of the General Staff, and the Army which fought the Great War was administered and organised on the lines laid down in this book (*Field Service Regulations*, Part II).

"I served under him at this time, and I remember thinking and saying that here indeed was what seemed to be a great man, so broad and far-seeing were his views."

Haig met Haldane for the first time on June 9th at Government House, Aldershot, under the auspices of General French, and upon one side at any rate the first impression was favourable—"Mr. Haldane", wrote Haig in his diary, "is a fat, big man, but with a kind, genial face. One seemed to like the man at once." And he added on the following day, "I had two walks with Mr. Haldane, before and also after lunch. He seems a most clear-headed and practical man, most ready to listen to and weigh carefully all that is said to him."

Haldane's first effort to establish some basis of agreement as to the future Territorial Army had been the formation of a conference under the chairmanship of Lord Esher, representing the various interests concerned, such as the militia, the yeomanry and the volunteers. Under the previous Conservative Government Esher had successfully presided over another committee that had introduced many important military reforms, including the creation of a



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General Staff. The present Committee, which never presented a report, was generally referred to as the Duma and Haig, although he was at present holding no official position in England and was merely an officer on leave, was immediately given a seat on it. A sudden attack of ague in July, however, which seized him while discussing with Lord Esher and French "the possibility of Turks supported by Germans attacking the Suez Canal and Egypt", put a temporary stop to his activities. A specialist whom he consulted found that his liver was enlarged, and recommended a cure at Tarasp in Switzerland. He spent a lonely month there during which he made the acquaintance of Mr. Leopold de Rothschild, who was to remain an intimate and lasting friend.

When he returned in August he took up his position as Director of Military Training, and plunged immediately into the great work that awaited him. The Duma had failed and was dispersed. "It was clear", writes General Ellison, "that the Secretary of State would have to take a line of his own, and from now onwards Haig's influence and active assistance, both in framing policy and elaborating details of organisation, were quite invaluable. . . . Soon after his arrival at the War Office, he was appointed Chairman of a small organising committee, on which I served as a member. On this committee and on the work of his own Department the gradual evolution of the Territorial Force as we know it today mainly depended. In saying this I in no way wish to detract from the part Mr. Haldane himself played in the enormously important changes effected during his administration at the War Office, but this I do say unhesitatingly that, without Haig, Mr. Haldane would have been hard put to it to elaborate a practical scheme of reorganisation in the first instance, or to drive the scheme through to its logical conclusion."

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It was of vital importance and proved of inestimable value to the British Empire that there should have been at this crucial moment two clear brains and powerful minds working at the great military problem. Two more different types it would be difficult to conceive than Haldane, the subtle-minded philosopher with the smooth flow of words, and the ponderous ungainly body, and Haig, the man of action, alert and vigorous physically and mentally, swift in decision, almost tongue-tied in debate. Two things they had in common, the vision of what was coming, and the determination to be prepared for it. One evening, after they had been dining alone together, Haig entered in his diary, "We discussed objects for which Army and Expeditionary Force exist. He in no doubt—viz. to organise to support France and Russia against Germany, and perhaps Austria. By organising war may be prevented."

Haig wrote to Ellison in October 1906: "Our object in my opinion should be to start a system of finance suited to the 'supposed situation', i.e. a great war requiring the whole resources of the nation to bring it to a successful end. Even if the proposed system costs more in peace, it should be inaugurated provided that it is more practical in war. The Swiss system seems to me to be exactly what is wanted 'to root the army in the people' . . . The Germans seem to be going ahead in every direction with the utmost self-assurance and energy, so that the crisis is sure of coming before many years are over. Their action in the Baghdad railway, Persian Gulf questions, Dutch sea defences, etc., etc., all point in the same direction."

Among the many difficulties that arose in connection with this vast work of reform and reconstruction, there were two outstanding ones with regard to both of which Haig's opinion was definite from the first and, after much opposition, eventually prevailed. One of these questions

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was the future of the Militia, and the other was the equipment of the Territorial Army with field artillery.

The origin of the Militia was bound up with the very beginnings of English history, its traditions were older than those of the Regular Army, its officers and those connected with it exercised an influence upon political opinion that was by no means negligible. It was not, therefore, surprising that a determined effort should have been made to preserve it, and one of the questions that was long at issue was whether the new system should be based upon three legs—Regulars, Militia and Territorials—or upon two, Regulars and Territorials. Haig was in favour of the latter alternative. He realised that the Militia would in fact be carrying out a part of the work that the Territorial Army was being created to perform, that its existence could only lead to confusion and might diminish in the eyes of the public the importance of the Territorial Army; and, in spite of much opposition from many distinguished soldiers, it was his view that was ultimately adopted.

He was determined that the new Territorial Force should be a real fighting machine, and not merely a collection of cheerful people playing at soldiers for a few weeks in the summer months. There had always been a suspicion of comedy attaching to the Volunteers, and anyone who was alive at the time can remember the derision with which the creation of the new army was greeted by the public, the press, and a powerful section of military opinion. Henry Wilson, then Commandant of the Staff College, openly sneered at it, and Lord Roberts lent his support to the opposition in the House of Lords.

Strong pressure was brought to bear on the Secretary of State by the highest Artillery authorities to omit field artillery altogether from the territorial scheme. It was insisted that the limited training of the Territorials was wholly in-

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sufficient to allow of them ever attaining to any degree of efficiency in so complicated and technical a branch of the profession. Lord Roberts said that the Territorial Field Artillery were a danger to the country. But Haig was not to be shaken, and he persuaded Haldane to stand firm.

“War Office,  
18/3/08.

Dear Mr. Haldane,

You will no doubt remember that two Batteries of the Lanarkshire Artillery Volunteers were turned out for special training last summer, and were brigaded with Regulars for about ten days at the Scottish manoeuvres. The chief object of this was to enable us to form some opinion as to the standard of efficiency which Volunteer Artillery could reach under the conditions then existing. I attach a letter from Colonel May who, as Assistant Director of Training, accompanied me specially to watch the work of this Artillery.

I fully agree with what he writes, and am of opinion that what was done by these sections shows that Volunteer Artillery can become mobile enough, even under the old system of training, to take part in field operations. I did not, however, see this Artillery at practice, but Colonel Wing's report on Allen's (Sheffield) Corps, 4th West Riding of Yorkshire, dated 9th August last, seems sufficient testimony on this head. His words are 'the practice was very satisfactory'. Wing is now Staff Officer for R.H. and Field Artillery to the Commander-in-Chief at Aldershot, and his opinion is that of an expert of today. Copy of Wing's report is attached.

In discussing the question of the standard of efficiency to which Volunteer Artillery can be brought, it seems highly important to notice that the very great changes are being

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made with the view of providing better means for training. Briefly put, they amount to the following:

1. The Volunteer Artillery is now to be organised as *Field* instead of *Garrison*, and will be formed in Artillery Brigades with Q.F. guns.

2. A Divisional Artillery Commander and Staff is provided to direct the training throughout the whole year.

3. The training of officers and N.C.Os. of the Territorial Artillery by means of the Regular Training Brigades.

4. The methodical association of Volunteer Artillery with Regulars at training centres and camps.

Lastly, the General Staff Officer in each Division of the Territorial Army brings the General Staff at Army Headquarters into close touch with the Territorial Force, so that the results of what is being done will be closely watched, and proposals for improvement in organisation and training will be carefully thought out and put forward as necessity demands.

For these reasons I deprecate any change in the policy of creating a 2nd-line Army complete in all arms and services.

Yours very truly,

(Sd.) Douglas Haig.

18.3.08."

The work was more arduous and fatiguing than any to which Haig had been accustomed. Long hours at his desk in the War Office were interrupted by luncheons and followed by dinners at Haldane's house in Queen Anne's Gate, sometimes alone with his chief and sometimes attended by other workers from the War Office or colleagues from the Cabinet. Too often also, when the dinners were over and the guests had left, a further consultation would take place in the Secretary of State's study, and the weary Director would not get home until the small hours. To

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Haldane such work was the breath of life, such hours were habitual and the discussion of difficult problems to the accompaniment of continual cigars was the pleasantest way of passing the time. But Haig did not talk easily and did not smoke at all. He was accustomed to early hours, fresh air and much exercise. It is not surprising, therefore, that after a year and a half of such strenuous labour his health gave way and during April and May of 1908 he was seriously ill.

He made, however, a quick recovery and was at work again by the middle of June. These were happy years, despite the intensity of the work. There was no time for hunting or polo, but there were visits to Windsor, Sandringham and Balmoral, as well as to the houses of his relatives in Scotland. In London there was always a home for him and his wife at 23 Prince's Gate, the house of Mr. and Mrs. Jameson, but he preferred to live in the country as much as possible, and therefore took a house at Farnborough from which he could travel to and fro. In March 1907 his first child, a daughter, was born, and a second daughter was born in November 1908.

His sister Henrietta was keenly interested in spiritualism, and on more than one occasion persuaded him to accompany her to a *séance*. He gravely set down in his diary what occurred without comment, and without offering an opinion as to the reliability of the participants. At his first visit, on being introduced to the lady with psychic powers and encouraged to consult the spirits with whom she was in communication, he asked which would be the better system for the expansion of the Territorial Army, a company or a battalion basis. It is possible to sympathise with the medium, who can hardly have been expecting an enquiry of this nature, and had certainly never been asked such a question before. The spirits favoured a company basis.

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The interview continued, "When under control by a little native girl called Sunshine, she said that I was influenced by several spirits—notably a small man named Napoleon, who aided me. That it was in my power to be helped by him for good affairs, but I might repel him if his influence was for bad, though he had become changed for the better in the spirit world. I was destined to do much good and benefit my country. Asked by me how to ensure the Territorial Army Scheme being a success, she said thought governed the world. Think out the scheme thoroughly, one's thoughts would then be put in such a convincing manner that the people would respond, without any compulsion, and the National Army would be a reality. She could not bring Napoleon to me, but I must think of him and try and get his aid as he was always near me."

The creation of the Territorial Army was not the only work that occupied Haig's time and attention. He was one of Haldane's most intimate advisers, more intimate than some whose positions were superior to his, and he was, as Haldane recognised in his book, *Before the War*, closely connected with all the important reforms carried out at this period.

The following is Haig's account of the coming into being of the Imperial General Staff:

"I had a most interesting forenoon yesterday. I met Mr. Haldane at the Colonial Office a little before eleven o'clock and attended the Colonial Conference with him. The Chief of General Staff and the Q.M.G. and Director of Operations were also there. At eleven o'clock Mr. Haldane took his seat on Lord Elgin's right. The latter presided. The Premiers were sitting at a horseshoe table on each side of him in order of seniority of the Colonies. Deakin, who made the good speech on Friday night, was on Elgin's left with his Defence Minister—latter very ugly with a goat-

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like beard and spectacles—on the whole like old Kruger. Next was Dr. Jim, then Moor from Natal, then Botha and his interpreter Dr. Smartt (of Cape Colony). On Haldane's right came Sir W. Laurier and Bordon (of Canada), then, representatives of New Zealand and Newfoundland and assistants farther down the table—two shorthand writers in the centre of the horseshoe, but at a small table apart. Secretaries at tables round the walls of the room. We four had chairs placed for us behind Haldane. The latter made a short speech of twenty minutes explaining our organisation, and ended with a motion for the Conference to adopt. All the Premiers then spoke in turn—all very patriotic. Mr. Haldane's speech was very well received and all asked that it should be published. His motion was also agreed to. The latter practically creates the Imperial General Staff and so puts 50% on to the value of the General Staff. It was nearly 2 before I got away, so I only caught the 3 p.m. train."

Haig's interest in questions of defence was not confined to military matters. He drew up about this time a lengthy memorandum dealing with the need of improved staff methods in the Navy. He had been deeply shocked to discover that "the leading naval power should have no text books on the art of naval war, and no naval records in an available form for the use of officers; and that Mr. Julian Corbett (a civilian) should be the only individual at present qualified to lecture on naval history."

The memorandum produced no immediate effect, but it was read by the Cabinet and effected a lasting impression on the mind of Winston Churchill. When the latter became First Lord of the Admiralty a few years later he immediately set about the organisation of a General Staff and the creation of a Naval War College. He remembered what Haig had written and turned to him for advice.



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"The general", he writes in the first volume of *The World Crisis*, "furnished me with a masterly paper setting forth the military doctrine of staff organisation, and constituting in many respects a formidable commentary on existing naval methods."

In November 1907 he was transferred from the post of Director of Military Training to that of Director of Staff Duties, but except for office routine his real work remained very much the same, for he arranged that several of the duties hitherto performed by his former office should be transferred to his latter one. Henceforward questions of policy and war organisation were dealt with by the Director of Staff Duties who therefore laid down the policy which the Director of Military Training had merely to carry out.

On April 15th, 1909, Sir O'Moore Creagh, who had been appointed Commander-in-Chief in India, called at the War Office and invited Haig to go out with him as his Chief of the Staff. At first Haig declined, saying that he was too fully occupied with the Imperial General Staff and other important matters. He was, however, given a week to think it over and finally decided to go. No reason is given in his diary for this decision. He doubtless felt that, interesting as his work had been, he had now had enough of it, that the Indian appointment would provide him with a new field of activity, and a new source of experience, and he was probably glad of a change from the long hours of office life.

Before leaving England, he witnessed the play, *An Englishman's Home*, which was having considerable success at the time. It depicted an imaginary invasion of England and held up to ridicule the complete unpreparedness of the inhabitants. "It is very extraordinary", he wrote, "how the play draws crowded houses every night, and how im-

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pressed the audience seems to be with the gravity of the scenes. I trust good may result and that universal training may become the law of the land, but for myself last night's performance was not an interesting sight—the incapacity of the whole of the people in defending their homes was disgusting."

As usual before leaving for a new post, Haig was summoned to Balmoral. Queen Alexandra realising what Lady Haig's feelings must be at parting with her children, had insisted on her bringing the two little girls to Scotland for a long visit, and had herself prepared certain rooms in the castle as nurseries for their use. Their father joined them there for a few days in September, and went out on the moors with the King, who had believed in and trusted him from the first, and whom he was never to see again. They must have anxiously discussed together the state of Europe and the danger, which was ever present to Haig's mind, lest the blow, which both foresaw, should fall while he was still in India. The Prince of Wales was present and Mr. McKenna, who was then First Lord of the Admiralty, with whom also Haig discussed the dangers that lay ahead.

A letter that Lord Haldane wrote to Haig before he sailed conveyed to him the impression that his work had left in the mind of the Secretary of State. "I have read", he wrote, "your new memorandum on the Cavalry Staff Ride. It gives me the sense of comfort which comes from seeing that there are in our Army those who are thinking out military science with a closeness which is not surpassed in the great military schools of thought on the Continent. You have cause to look back on three memorable years' work with satisfaction, and to say to yourself '*quorum pars magna fui*'."

In recognition of these services and of the importance of

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his new post Haig received during this year the K.C.V.O., and Sir Douglas and Lady Haig sailed for India on October 8th.

The years that followed gave him the opportunity of judging the results produced by his own work during his previous appointment as Inspector General of Cavalry, and of carrying on the reforms and impressing more deeply the principles which he had then endeavoured to introduce. He had been largely instrumental in the establishment of the Indian Staff College at Quetta. He would have preferred an arrangement under which officers from the Indian Army could have attended courses at the Staff College at Camberley, but this proposal had been abandoned owing to financial considerations. The activities of Quetta were now in full swing, and Haig paid two visits to the college and delivered lectures to the students.

He was anxious to impress upon them, and upon everybody in India, an imperial outlook upon military affairs. He persistently combated the idea that there was one army of Great Britain and another of India and that the latter was concerned only with the affairs of that subcontinent. His opinion on this matter, the wisdom of which became, in the light of after events, so plainly apparent, did not recommend itself to the higher authorities at the time. When it was discovered by Lord Morley, Secretary of State for India, that the Chief of the Staff in India had carefully worked out a scheme for the utilisation of the Indian Army outside the frontiers of India in the emergency of a world war, orders were peremptorily sent out from home and transmitted to Haig by the Viceroy, that not only were all studies of this nature to be abandoned forthwith, but that also, incredible as it may seem, any plans of this nature that had been drawn up were to be destroyed.

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Haig gave the necessary instructions, in accordance with his bounden duty, to the senior officer concerned, General Hamilton Gordon, who, however, declared later that there was at the time "a look in Haig's eye which made me realise that he would not regard any deviation from rigid adherence to orders with undue severity". Instead of being destroyed as commanded the plan was carefully preserved, and in the fullness of time when the need for it was felt it was brought forth from its hiding place, so that in 1914 troops were conveyed from India to Europe according to the very scheme that Haig had been reprimanded for preparing.

Nor was it only with regard to the transfer of troops from India to Europe that Haig's mind was busy during these years. He further worked out in detail schemes for military operations directed from India both against Mesopotamia and German East Africa, and these schemes were actually adopted during the war.

During this period it was not only by the drawing up of definite schemes to meet definite emergencies that Haig was preparing for the future: he was also storing up information in his mind and reflecting deeply on the wider problems of warfare. He made use of the increased leisure that he was enjoying to return to the abstract study of his profession, while at the same time enjoying its practical application. At the end of his diary for 1910 there is a formidable list of works that he had read during the year with a brief criticism of each. It concludes with Clausewitz *On War*, of which he writes, "The most profound book on the subject, showing how much there is in it, and still the best guide on *general principles*."

The chief event of 1910 was the death of King Edward VII, which came as a severe personal loss to Sir Douglas Haig and his wife. Fortunately they had already made the

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acquaintance of the new King, who was to prove to them as good a friend as his father had been.

At the end of the year a change took place in the Government of India, the Viceroy, Lord Minto, who had been there since Lord Curzon left in 1905, being succeeded by Lord Hardinge. As president of the United Service Club at Simla, Haig took the chair at the farewell banquet, and surprised many of his friends by making a highly successful speech. He made two prophecies on this occasion, one of which was to the effect that the people of India were destined to obtain a larger share in the government of their own country, a development to which he looked forward without any alarm. He further foretold with confidence and, as it proved, with accuracy, that in any future world war the Army of India was destined to play its part.

Early in 1911 the Crown Prince of Germany paid a visit to India, but Haig, although present at all the official festivities, does not appear to have had any private conversation with the royal visitor, and there is no record in the diary of the impression that he produced.

In May he received a message from Haldane offering him the Aldershot command which was shortly to be vacated by Sir Horace Smith Dorrien. It was characteristic of him that, when the telegram containing this offer of the most important command in Great Britain was brought to him late one evening by the officer who had decoded it, his only comment was, "This could have waited over until the morning."

He was naturally glad to accept, but by the Viceroy's wish it was arranged that he should remain until after the Durbar which was to take place in December, and which he accordingly attended when he received the decoration of the K.C.I.E.

Two days before Christmas he sailed from India. He



HAIG IN INDIA, 1911



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could not tell as he left Bombay on the voyage that he had made so often that he would not visit again that country where he had served from subaltern to Chief of Staff, and that he was saying farewell to the East for the last time.

For two years and a half Haig held the position of Commander-in-Chief at Aldershot, residing there at Government House. He actually took over the command on March 1st, 1912, and he remained there until August 1914. No sensational events so far as he and his command were concerned took place during this period. It was the lull *before the storm*.

Aldershot did not regard with unmixed delight the arrival of a Commander-in-Chief from India, who had been promoted over the heads of several senior officers, whose service had hitherto been mainly abroad, and who was accompanied by one or two staff officers drawn from the Army of India. Their arrival was popularly referred to as the "Hindoo Invasion".

He did not, however, take long to overcome any distrust of this nature, and to impress upon all ranks serving under him the thoroughness of his professional knowledge, and the sincerity of his zeal for their efficiency and welfare. Not only was he indefatigable in his study of their training, but he also attempted to form the acquaintance of every officer under his command. With this object in view he substituted, for the large entertainments which his predecessors had been accustomed to provide, a far greater number of small dinner parties at which he came into close contact with each of his guests. Dinner parties of a dozen were given about three times a week, at which he proved an admirable host and made every effort to abandon the reserve that was natural to his character.

There are fewer entries than usual in the diary for 1912 and he does not appear to have kept a diary for 1913. Nor



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are there any letters that he wrote during this period, as he was constantly seeing all those with whom he might otherwise have corresponded. He arranged a Staff Ride each year and under his auspices the Torchlight Tattoo, which had been started on a small scale a few years previously, assumed something like its modern dimensions.

Although the international situation had quietened down on the surface since the Agadir incident in 1911, there was trouble brewing in the Balkans which led to the outbreak of war in October 1912. Haig watched every detail of the conflict that followed with the closest attention, seeking to derive lessons from it which should prove of service in the greater contest which he knew was drawing nearer every month. Fortunately his fears were shared by French, who became Chief of the Imperial General Staff in 1912, and by Henry Wilson, who was Director of Military Operations. Haldane, who in the same year became Lord Chancellor, was succeeded by Sir John Seely as Secretary of State for War, whose tenure of that office was brought to an end by the incident of the Curragh.

During the early part of the year 1914 political party strife in Great Britain raged more fiercely than at any previous period during the last two centuries. The Liberal Government were proposing to compel the Protestant inhabitants of Northern Ireland to accept the terms of a Home Rule Bill which would have subjected them to the domination of the Catholic majority in the south. In Ulster volunteers were drilling and arming with a view to resisting these proposals by force. Gun running was taking place and a clash between the volunteers and the armed forces of the Crown seemed not improbable.

In these circumstances the General Officer Commanding in Ireland assembled the officers serving under him and on instructions from the War Office informed them that,

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should such an eventuality arise, those of them whose homes were actually in Ulster would be allowed to go on leave and would not return to duty until the close of operations. At the same time it was stated that any other officer who considered that conscientious motives might interfere with the performance of his duty should say so at once and he would be immediately dismissed the Service. Officers were given an interval in which to consider their position. When they reassembled, Brigadier-General Hubert Gough and fifty-seven other officers, out of a total of seventy, of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade stated that they were prepared to accept dismissal.

John Gough, the brother of Hubert, was at this time serving as Haig's Chief of Staff at Aldershot. He announced his intention of resigning his commission if his brother were dismissed. Haig was profoundly disturbed. His Presbyterian traditions naturally inclined him to sympathy with Ulster, but his notions of discipline revolted at the idea of soldiers stating the conditions of their obedience. It was impossible to blame Gough and those who had acted with him. They had been presented by the higher authorities with a dilemma, and, guided by their consciences, had selected the alternative, which was the more likely to prove disastrous to their careers. Haig was naturally anxious before all things that the army should not lose the services of so many valuable officers at such a time. He visited London on purpose to discuss the matter with Haldane, and a solution of the difficulty was eventually arrived at by the Cabinet. It was laid down that in future no soldier should be required to answer hypothetical questions of the kind propounded at the Curragh, and that equally no soldier should be entitled to ask for assurances as to the conditions in which his services might be required. It was clearly stated to be "the duty of every officer and soldier to obey all

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lawful commands given to them through the proper channel, either for the safeguarding of public property or the support of the civil power in the ordinary execution of its duty or for the protection of the lives and property of the inhabitants in the case of disturbance of the peace”.

When General Gough enquired whether under the words just quoted officers would be required to assist in enforcing the Home Rule Bill, Sir John Seely added two paragraphs to the document, in which it was asserted that the Government had “no intention whatever of taking advantage of the right to crush political opposition to the policy or principles of the Home Rule Bill”. These paragraphs, which were signed by Sir John Seely, were also initialed by Sir John French, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Sir Spencer Ewart, Adjutant General, and when Sir Hubert enquired further whether this relieved him from the “liability to order his Brigade to assist in enforcing submission to a Home Rule Bill”, Sir John French wrote in reply, “I should so read it.”

When these paragraphs were subsequently brought to the notice of the Prime Minister, he realised that they violated the principle which he was most anxious to maintain, namely, that soldiers should not be allowed to strike a bargain with the civil power concerning the terms of their service. He immediately caused General Gough to be informed that he must consider the two paragraphs as non-operative. Sir John Seely resigned and Sir John French and Sir Spencer Ewart felt it their duty to do likewise, but so far as the officers at the Curragh were concerned no further questions were asked, no further assurances demanded. Mr. Asquith himself assumed the position of Secretary of State for War, which he combined with that of Prime Minister.

The incident was unfortunate, and was badly mishandled. It left an unpleasant atmosphere behind. It had

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brought the Army into politics, which is always to be deplored, and it had raised the hideous spectre of civil war. But it had done more harm abroad than at home. From Paris and St. Petersburg every development was watched with the keenest anxiety, and in Berlin the news was received with unconcealed satisfaction, for the month was March 1914—and the time was short.

## Chapter VI

### INTO BATTLE

From the day when Douglas Haig went to Sandhurst in the year 1884, every hour of his life had been dedicated to preparation for a great ordeal. The military profession had been for him neither an easy alternative to idling, nor a pleasant excuse for leading an open-air life in congenial companionship. It had been, on the contrary, a stern and a high calling, which had demanded from its votary all the application and devotion of which he was capable. The thirty years that had passed since he entered Sandhurst had not been wasted. Bringing with him from the Royal Military College the sword of honour, we have seen him daring to take his profession seriously as a young subaltern in a light-hearted cavalry regiment in India, and later seizing upon every opportunity of studying its practice in the two greatest military countries of Europe. We have seen him surpassing his contemporaries at the Staff College, availing himself of the first opportunity to experience active service in the Soudan, at the elbow of the most successful General in South Africa, holding two of the highest military posts in India, and between the two appointments acting as right-hand man to Lord Haldane in the great task of preparing the Expeditionary Force and creating the Territorial Army. It is impossible to read the letters and diaries that he wrote during these busy thirty years without realising how completely he himself appre-

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ciated them as a period of preparation. With the politics of these affairs he was not concerned; towards Germany and the German people he bore no ill will. It had seemed plain to him that the war must come, and equally plain had seemed his duty to render himself and his country ready for its coming. When at last the blow fell and the war broke out, he greeted it in no spirit of enthusiasm. It was the moment for which he had been preparing, but to which he had not looked forward with any emotions save those of awe and dread. He knew how fierce and how long a struggle lay before his country, and how tremendous were the issues which were at stake.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, July 29th, he received a telegram from the Secretary of State for War, instructing him to adopt "precautionary measures" as detailed in the Defence Scheme. "All our arrangements were ready," he writes in his diary, "even to the extent of having the telegrams written out. These merely had to be dated and despatched." Six days later, at five in the evening, he received a telegraphic message containing the one word "Mobilise". Everything was so perfectly in readiness, every detail had been so well thought out and foreseen that on the receipt of these momentous instructions it was unnecessary for the General Officer Commanding at Aldershot to take a single decision. "I had thus", he writes, "all my time free to make arrangements for my own departure for the front, to visit Field Marshal French's G.H.Q. now established at the Hotel Metropole in London, and to ponder over the terribly critical military situation as it gradually developed day by day."

Haig was not acquainted with the details of the negotiations which had for long been in progress between the French and English General Staffs and in which Sir Henry Wilson had been the principal participator from this side

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of the Channel. He was not therefore aware that Great Britain was practically committed to supporting the left wing of the French Army with four or five divisions in the event of the Government deciding to take part in the war. In these circumstances he was at first inclined to doubt the wisdom of devoting the whole of our Expeditionary Force to the hazardous task of attempting to stem the first onrush of the German Army. He knew, better than most, how formidable that first attack would be, and he appreciated the danger, which was so narrowly averted, of that small force being utterly wiped out by the enormous superiority of numbers. Differing from many of the military advisers, but in agreement with Kitchener, he believed that the war must be a long one, that the whole country and the whole Empire must be organised to meet it, and he hesitated to imperil the small army, that he had done so much to prepare, before the work of imperial organisation could be started.

When the newspaper demand for the appointment of Kitchener to the post of Secretary of State for War was at its height, Haig wrote to Haldane:

“Government House, Farnborough, Hants.

*Personal.*

*Tuesday, 4th August, 1914.*

“My dear Lord Haldane,

What an anxious time you must be having, but what a satisfaction it must be to you to see that this country is *able* to draw on her vast resources at the moment of crisis as a result of the thought and labour you spent on the problem when you were Secretary of State.

“So I make so bold as to write and express a hope that you will, even at great personal inconvenience, return to the War Office for as long as war lasts and preparations are necessary. No one knows the details of the problem of

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organisation as you do! This war will last many months, possibly years, so I venture to hope that our only bolt (and that not a very big one) may not suddenly be shot on a project of which the success seems to me quite doubtful—I mean the checking of the German advance into France. Would it not be better to begin at once to enlarge our Expeditionary Force by amalgamating less regular forces with it? In three months' time we should have quite a considerable army, so that when we do take the field we can act decisively and dictate terms which will ensure a lasting peace.

"I presume, of course, that France can hold out even though her forces have to fall back from the frontier for the necessary time for us to create an army of 300,000.

"Forgive me bothering you with a letter, but I do see the great advantages for the Empire of having you at the War Office at this time, and with every good wish,

I am, Yours very truly,  
(Sgd.) Douglas Haig.

"P.S. I have dashed off this letter on reading the leader in to-day's *Times* on Lord K.

"What I feel is that we have such a mass of undeveloped power which no one knows better than yourself how to organise and control. This will be impossible if the bulk of our highly trained regular officers are at once carted off to France and a Secretary of State is appointed who is new to the existing system. I do hope you will set to work at once to complete the organisation you started in 1906.

(Sgd.) D. Haig."

On the afternoon of the day after this letter was written, Haig attended a War Council at 10 Downing Street. It will be seen that, doubtless as a result of discussions which he had had with Henry Wilson and others, his views had already undergone considerable modification.



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"At 4 p.m. I attended a War Council at 10 Downing Street. Mr. Asquith (the Prime Minister) was in the Chair. He began with a brief statement of the circumstances in which he had summoned this Council. The Germans had crossed their frontier into Belgium early yesterday (the 4th August). War had actually been declared between England and Germany, between Russia and Germany and between France and Germany but as yet Austria was not technically at war with any country except Serbia. One unexpected factor in the situation was the neutrality of Italy. It must now be assumed that Italy would not stand in with Germany and Austria. A further unexpected factor in the situation was the action of Belgium and Holland. Belgium appeared to be offering a better resistance than had been anticipated. Germany was reported to have violated Dutch Limburg, and was apparently determined to overwhelm all resistance.

"Sir John French gave in outline a prearranged plan which had been worked out between the British and French General Staffs. Briefly stated, it was hoped that the Expeditionary Force would mobilise simultaneously with the French, and would be concentrated behind the French left at Maubeuge by the fifteenth day of mobilisation. The intention then was to move eastwards towards the Meuse, and act on the left of the French against the German right flank. We were now however late in mobilising, and so this plan was no longer possible. He spoke about his hopes of now going to Antwerp and operating with the Belgian and possibly Dutch Armies.

"The alternative routes for reaching Antwerp were then discussed: viz. whether by sea or land.

"The Navy, the First Lord (Churchill) stated, could not protect the passage of our transports during the longer sea passage across the North Sea to the Scheldt.

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"Then the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Douglas) pointed out that the military plans were worked out for an embarkation at Newhaven, Southampton and Bristol, with a landing at Havre, Boulogne and other French ports in the Channel. The French had also arranged for rolling stock and prepared railway time tables for the movement of our units. A change of destination at the last moment would have serious consequences.

"Personally, I trembled at the reckless way Sir John French spoke about 'the advantages' of the B.E.F. operating from Antwerp against the powerful and still intact German Army! So, when it came to my turn to speak, I formulated a number of questions to bring out the risk we would run of 'defeat in detail' if we separated from the French at the outset of the campaign. 'Have we enough troops, with the Belgians, to carry on a campaign independently of the French, or do we run excessive risk, if we act separately, of defeat in detail?' and 'What does our General Staff know of the fighting value of the Belgian Army?' I also made these points: *1st.* That Great Britain and Germany would be fighting for their existence. Therefore, the war was bound to be a long war, and neither would acknowledge defeat after a short struggle. I knew that German writers had stated in their books that a modern war in Europe would not last more than a few months. In my opinion, that was what they hoped for and what they were planning to make it. I held that we must organise our resources *for a war of several years.* *2nd.* Great Britain must at once take in hand the creation of an army. I mentioned one million as the number to aim at immediately, remarking that that was the strength originally proposed for the Territorial Force by Lord Haldane. Above all, we ought to aim at having a strong and effective force when we came to discuss peace at a Conference of the

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Great Powers. 3rd. We only had a small number of trained officers and N.C.O's. These must be economised. The need for efficient instructors would become at once apparent. I urged that a considerable proportion of officers and N.C.O's should be withdrawn from the Expeditionary Force. (This latter suggestion met with much opposition from Sir John French, with the result that only 3 officers per battalion were retained in England from the Battalions now ordered to France.) *Lastly*, my advice was to send as strong an Expeditionary Force as possible and as soon as possible, to join the French Forces and to arrange to increase that Force as rapidly as possible."

The historian of the Great War, especially when he is a contemporary, would have a more grateful task to perform if it could be shown that all those who were devoted to the same cause worked together from first to last in single-minded unity; if no differences of opinion had ever led to personal animosity, if no doubts of competence had ever sown dissension between old comrades, and if no mutual misunderstandings had ever led to bitter antipathy and served to darken counsel. But since the earliest days of warfare, before Achilles sulked in his tent or Brutus and Cassius quarrelled in theirs, it has unfortunately been the case that men who should have been bound together by the objects for which they were contending, and by the ideals they shared, have allowed divergence of views on questions of policy so to obsess their minds and affect their judgments as not only to make it impossible for them to work harmoniously with one another, but also to render them capable of scheming against colleagues with energies that should have all been devoted to better purposes.

When, however, much is chronicled that reader and writer would have wished otherwise, and when opinions are expressed as to who was in the right and who was in the

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wrong, it should in justice to all these men be remembered that each one of them was serving the cause of his country with the same passionate devotion to its well-being, the same desperate eagerness for swift victory and lasting peace. And it was just because of the sincerity with which they held their convictions that they found it difficult to tolerate the presence of others maintaining views which they believed must prove disastrous to the cause.

It is particularly sad when soldiers who have served together in warfare, who have ridden side by side under the fire of the enemy, drift apart from one another and come to lose the mutual confidence which had once united them. Fourteen years had passed since French and Haig had planned and led the great ride to the relief of Kimberley. In the days of peace they had seen little of one another. In private life they had neither friends nor pursuits in common, and Haig, who had so sternly devoted these years to acquiring further proficiency in his profession, could not believe that French, who took life more easily, possessed either the military knowledge or the gifts of character demanded by the great position which he had been called upon to fill. "In my own heart", he wrote in his diary on August 11th, "I know that French is quite unfit for this great command at a time of crisis in our nation's history."

It is not surprising that, with this knowledge in his heart, his thoughts of the future were fraught with anxiety. These were crowded days of great events. On August 6th another War Council was held at Downing Street when the despatch and the composition of the first instalment of the Expeditionary Force was finally settled. On the 9th he motored to Southampton where the Headquarters of the First Army Corps were mobilising. On the 10th he motored to London and learnt that the area in which British troops were to concentrate in France had not yet

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been decided. On the 11th the King and Queen visited Aldershot to bid farewell to the troops. On the 12th and 13th he again visited London, but it was only on the latter day that Sir John French was able to inform him of the decision to concentrate in the vicinity of Le Cateau and Wassigny.

"In view of the ignorance", he wrote, "still existing regarding the enemy's movements, the rate of his advance into Belgium, and his intentions, it seems to some of us somewhat risky to begin our concentration so close to the enemy. A considerable hostile army is probably now passing westwards through Liège, while Le Cateau is about midway between Namur and Amiens.

"I return to Aldershot by 2 o'clock, and lunch with Doris. She is very brave; her thoughts are chiefly centred on what she can do for the wives and families of those who are leaving for the front. Also she hopes to show the value of all her hard work in encouraging training in Red Cross Voluntary Aid Work (V.A.D.). I play golf with Doris in the afternoon. I was not very skilful, but it was a reason for going out together. I felt the great uncertainties of the future lying before me and could not talk much. The situation which I had often pondered over had now come to pass. I felt that there must be great difficulties and uncertainties before each one of us. When at the R.M.C., Sandhurst, in 1884, I had studied the main incidents of the Franco-German War 1870-71, and throughout my military career since those days I had continued to study that campaign. The country between Paris and Berlin is well known to me, both as the result of many studies on the map, as well as of occasional visits to France, Belgium and Germany. The characteristics, too, of the German people as compared with the French and ourselves, have also been a subject of interest to me. I have also felt for many years,

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dating from my stay in Berlin in 1896, that war between Germany and England was sure to break out as soon as Germany felt strong enough to hold her own on the sea. The conditions of what a European struggle between two great nations meant in the past are not unknown to me. I also tried to think out many a time what the next great European War is likely to mean for an army engaged in it. But in all my dreams I have never been so bold as to imagine that, when that war did break out, I should hold one of the most important commands in the British Army. I feel very pleased at receiving command of the First Army Corps, and I also feel the greatest confidence that we will give a good account of ourselves, *if only* our higher command give us a reasonable chance! I have a first-rate Staff and my troops are throughout well commanded. Major-General Lomax commands the 1st Division. He is an experienced and practical leader, much beloved by the men, most loyal to me, and I have a thorough trust in his ability to command his division well, even in the worst of difficulties. The 2nd Division has just been given a new Commander, viz. Major-General Monro in the place of Major-General Archibald Murray (who has been selected by Sir John French to be the Chief of Staff of the Expeditionary Force). Monro proved himself to be a good regimental officer and an excellent commandant of the Hythe School of Musketry, but some years with Territorials has resulted in his becoming rather fat. There is, however, no doubt about his military ability, although he lacks the practical experience in commanding a Division. The Brigades and Battalions are also well commanded, and the regimental officers are probably the best all round in any army. The Artillery and Mounted Troops are also highly trained and thoroughly well found. On the other hand, our numbers are very small indeed, and I have an uneasy feeling lest we

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may be thoughtlessly committed to some great general action before we have had time to absorb our reservists. Any precipitate engagement of our little force may lose us the inestimable value which our highly trained divisions do possess not only as a unit in battle, but also as a leaven for raising the morale of the great National Army which the Government is now proceeding to organise. This uneasy feeling which disturbs me springs, I think, in great measure from my knowledge of the personalities of which our high command is composed. I have already stated somewhat briefly my opinion of Sir John French's ability as a Commander in the Field. His military ideas often shocked me when I was his Chief of Staff during the South African War. In those days, with only mounted troops under him, he fortunately could not put into practice some special theories which he told me he had deduced from Hamley's *Operations of War*. A chance for this came to him, however, last autumn, when as Director of Manoeuvres he handled a force (representing the Expeditionary Force) against a skeleton enemy. His instructions for moving along the front of his enemy (then halted in a fortified position) and subsequently attacking the latter's distant flank were of such an unpractical nature that his Chief of the General Staff (Grierson) demurred. Some slight modifications in the orders were permitted, but Grierson ceased to be his C.G.S. in case of mobilisation, and was very soon transferred to another appointment in the B.E.F.

"... With all this knowledge of the Chief behind me, I have grave reason for being anxious about what happens to us in the great adventure upon which we are now to start this very night. However, I am determined to behave as I did in the South African War, namely, to be thoroughly loyal and do my duty as a subordinate should, trying all the time to see Sir John's good qualities and not his weak ones.

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For most certainly French and Murray have much to commend them, although neither in my opinion is at all fitted for the appointment which he now holds at this moment of crisis in our country's history."

On the evening of the day on which he made the above entry in his diary, he drove from Aldershot to Southampton where he spent the night at the Dolphin Hotel. The next day Mr. and Mrs. Jameson drove down from London to say goodbye to him as they had so often done in the past. "They bring a sumptuous luncheon with several bottles of champagne. The landlady of the Dolphin kindly lends us her private sitting room in which to have it. The party is Henrietta, Charteris, Baird, Willie, Gough and myself, and we sit in that order at a round table. We all drink to success and our safe return."

That evening he went on board, and after a comfortless journey he arrived the next morning at Havre. It was August 15th, the birthday of Napoleon.

The British Expeditionary Force which, according to plans carefully drawn up beforehand, was conveyed from England to France between August 12th and August 17th, consisted of about 100,000 men. It was divided into two Army Corps, the First commanded by Sir Douglas Haig, the Second by Sir James Grierson. In each Army Corps there were two Divisions. The First and Second Divisions belonged to the First Army Corps, and they were commanded by General Lomax and General Monro respectively. In each Division there were three Brigades and in each Brigade there were four Battalions. The strength of a Division was about 18,000 men. In addition to these four Infantry Divisions there was one Cavalry Division under the command of General Allenby. It is important, with a view to maintaining a sense of proportion, to remember that as against these five British Divisions there were



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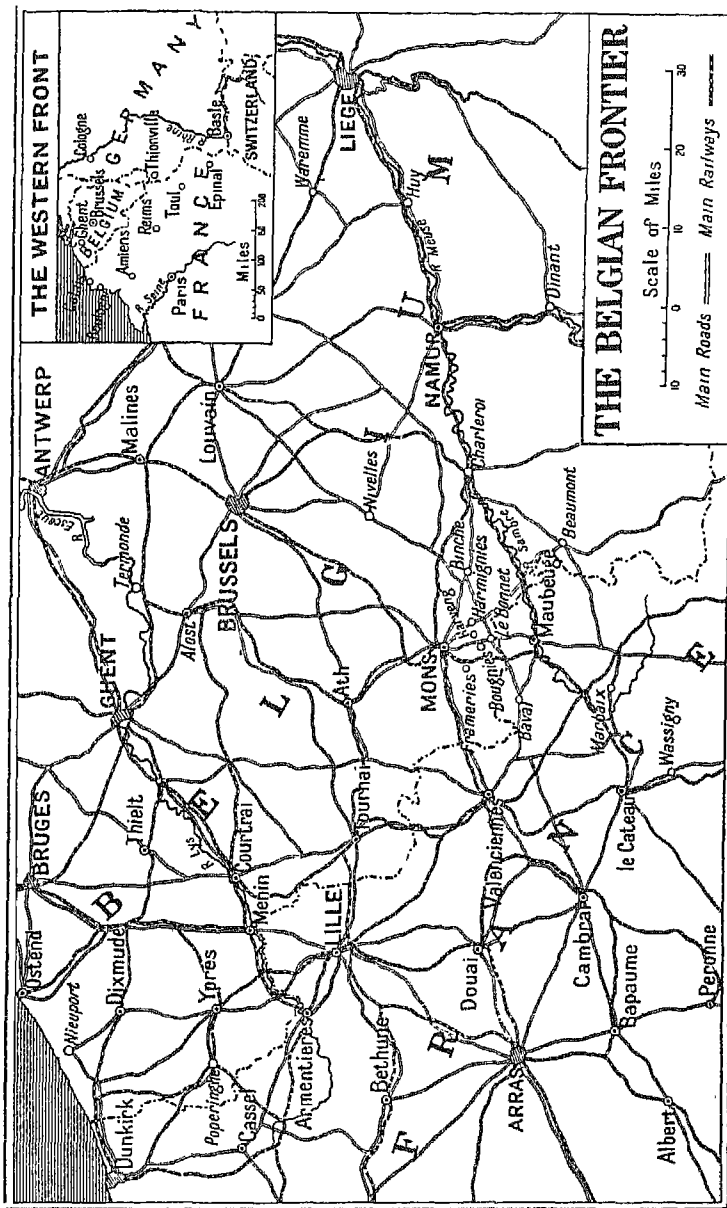
seventy French and seventy-two German Divisions on the Western Front.

Haig spent the night of August 15th at Tortoni's Hotel in Havre, and on the following morning went with General Grierson to call on the French General in Command of the town. "After talking platitudes for a few minutes, we were asked to drink a glass of sweet champagne to the health of the two Armies."

In the afternoon he went for a walk with his Chief of Staff, John Gough, an old and dear friend who had won the Victoria Cross in Somaliland. "We saw several ships coming in carrying cavalry and their horses as well as other units. As the ships steamed slowly up the harbour a great crowd on the piers cheered again and again. The troops on board the ships answered with raucous sounds. There was great enthusiasm today, and it being Sunday, large crowds were about. We were saluted everywhere with great respect and little children ran up and grasped our hands as we walked along."

Their train left at one o'clock in the morning, and they travelled all through the night and most of the following day. At 9 a.m. they halted at the small station of Serquex, where Haig was called to the telephone and learnt that Grierson had died suddenly in the train two hours before. He was asked for instructions. "I said the train was to continue its journey to Amiens and to report the matter to General Robb, commanding the line of communications, who was at Amiens. It seemed of no use for me to delay until the train with the 2nd Army Corps Headquarters came up, as I could do nothing. I heard later that the cause of death was aneurism of the heart."

He continued his own journey and arrived that evening at Wassigny, where he established his first headquarters in France.





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The next morning he drove to Le Cateau, about seven miles to the north, where the Commander-in-Chief and General Headquarters were established. A conference took place at which French "explained the situation and indicated a possible line of action but refrained from giving definite orders until divisions had fully concentrated".

The two days that followed were uneventful ones for the British Army. News came slowly through in meagre quantities, but already on the 18th it was sufficient for Haig to make deductions which proved correct. "I gathered that the Belgian Army is falling back on Antwerp while the Germans are crossing the Meuse in considerable strength (at least four Corps) about Huy and Liège and marching with all speed westwards on Brussels and Namur. They have a railhead at Warenné already. This looks as if a great effort is to be made to turn the French left, which rests on Namur fortress, by an advance through Belgium. In fact, the solution of the problem which was given as the most likely one when I was at Camberley Staff College in 1897."

On Friday, August 21st, the advance of the British Army into Belgium began. The I Corps moved in a north-westerly direction towards Maubeuge. Haig slept that night at Marbaix and he wrote in his diary, "So far the men look on the campaign as a picnic. I and my Staff are rather anxious about our position. We are advancing against a difficult position (Charleroi-Mons), a boggy valley, many coal pits and greatly intersected country. Briefly, a country in which the enemy could hold us with a few troops; meantime his great masses are marching as fast as possible round our left flank, and as far as we know *are unopposed!*"

On August 22nd the advance continued, and Haig saw the enemy, in the shape of three German prisoners, for the first time. They had been captured by the 4th Dragoon Guards. The cavalry, thrown out as a screen in front of the

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two Army Corps, were leading the advance. The Second Army Corps were on the left, and the First Army Corps had the French Fifth Army on their right.

In the afternoon Haig motored over to Beaumont, where were the Headquarters of the XVIII French Corps, and made the acquaintance of General Mas Latrie whom he found most friendly. He also recognised in the General's Chief of Staff an old acquaintance, Colonel Carillon, whom he had met at the French Cavalry manœuvres twenty-one years before.

When he returned to his own Headquarters, he found that orders had been received for a further immediate advance. It was too late for these to be conveyed to the Second Division, who in consequence spent the night in the billets which they had already occupied. The First Division, on the other hand, were obliged to carry out a long and fatiguing night march. Haig's feelings that night, as recorded in his diary, were first that French's Headquarters at Le Cateau were too far from the scene of action—some thirty miles to the rear—and secondly that not sufficient attention was being paid to the information which was being received in continually increasing strength and detail to the effect that the enemy was advancing in large numbers towards Ath and Tournai, to the north-west of the British front, and thus threatening to envelop the Expeditionary Force.

The next morning Haig made an early start from his Headquarters at Maubeuge. At a château near Sars la Bruyère he met Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, who had arrived the day before from England in order to take over the command of the Second Army Corps in succession to Sir James Grierson. Later in the morning Sir John French arrived and a conference took place. Shells were falling about two miles from the château.

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"The general situation as explained by Sir John French on information given by General H. Wilson from air reconnaissance, etc., showed at least 3 German Corps 'suitably placed for an attack on Mons and vicinity'. Little attention seemed to be paid to the reports which have been coming in for several days that the enemy is moving in large masses on Tournai. The Commander-in-Chief had apparently not discussed the situation with his intelligence officer (Macdonogh) because the latter, who was not in the conference room, told me after the conference that aeroplanes reported all the roads running west from Brussels to Ath and Tournai were thickly covered with masses of German troops of all arms marching very rapidly westwards. This was indeed an alarming situation. Yet our C.-in-C. ordered my Corps to press on. Wilson had news that the French would re-establish the situation by a break through in the Ardennes or in Alsace! De Castelnau was about to deliver an enormous attack which must succeed!"

In the lines quoted above there is apparently some indication of the suspicion with which Haig regarded the opinions and the methods of Henry Wilson. These two distinguished soldiers were unfortunately possessed of temperaments which were mutually antipathetic. The Lowland Scot and the Ulsterman should have much in common, but in this instance there was no bond of union. The ready wit, the hearty laugh, the almost unfailing charm of the exuberant Irishman produced no impression but distrust in the mind of the cautious Scotsman, who did not share his belief in the great superiority of French Generals. In this particular instance Haig's instinct was right, and Wilson's information was wrong, for the attack of the French First and Second Armies—the latter commanded by Castelnau—had been shattered three days before.

The 1st and 2nd Divisions were distributed on this day

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(August 23rd) in villages south-east of Mons, and west of Binche, the most advanced positions they were to hold for many years. During the morning and the early afternoon there were no developments on this part of the front, but the Second Army Corps, on the left, were heavily engaged. Part of the 2nd Division were in reserve behind the 3rd Division which formed the right wing of the Second Corps. In the afternoon "a motor car arrived to say Hubert Hamilton (in command of the 3rd Division) was being seriously attacked and wanted support. His advanced troops had been driven back from the canal north, and north-east of Mons. I got into a motor and went to the cross roads about three miles north of Le Bonnet. Heavy firing was then going on to the north and great columns of refugees were seen leaving Mons and advancing on Hamilton's position. I should have liked to have sent forward the Guards Brigade and Haking (5th Brigade) to counter-attack, but my right was still being attacked. I therefore ordered the 4th (Guards) Brigade to Hartweg with instructions to detach two Battalions to Hill 93 (North of Harmignies) so as to relieve two Battalions of 3rd Division now on it. I also had Haking's Brigade (5th) and the bulk of the artillery of the 2nd Division in readiness near cross roads north-east of Bournies to support in case of necessity." He then wrote to Smith-Dorrien as follows:

"X roads at Le Bonnet,  
23rd August. 5.35 p.m.

"Dear Smith-Dorrien,

I felt sorry that I could not comply with your request to fill the gap between the left of your 3rd and right of your 5th Divisions.

"At the time I received your request our line east of Givry was being attacked from the direction of Binche.

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"The best I could do was to relieve your detachment on Hill 93 (near Harmignies) by two Battalions of Guards thus setting free two of Hamilton's Battalions.

"The rest of the 4th Brigade is near Hartweg. Hakings' Brigade and Artillery of 2nd Division in readiness near X roads N.E. of Bougnies.

"Let me know your views for tomorrow as soon as darkness sets in. If all goes well on my right I should like to support Hamilton in driving enemy back into Mons—while to reduce the gap between your 3rd and 5th Divisions would it not be possible to attack from your left?

"Shall I come over and see you about 8 p.m.? Unless you and I meet, co-ordination between our two corps will be difficult."

Hardly had this letter been despatched when Smith-Dorrien himself, together with his Chief of Staff, arrived at Haig's Headquarters. Their demand was for assistance in filling a gap near Frameries between Hubert Hamilton's left and the right of the 5th Division. "The battle is won," exclaimed the Chief of Staff, "if you will only send us a battalion or two."

Haig accordingly ordered General Haking to take three battalions of infantry and to march at once in accordance with General Smith-Dorrien's orders, which would be given him en route. There was an idea that the enemy was breaking through in a part of the II Corps' front which was most easy to defend, because in the immediate front lay a regular town, with coal pits and high, pyramid-shaped stacks of shale. Haking reported later that he deployed a few men but no enemy was met.

When Haig went to bed at midnight he was not dissatisfied with the situation. Everywhere the British had held their positions and they had inflicted very heavy casualties



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on the enemy. But his sleep and his satisfaction were of short duration. At 2 a.m. he was aroused by a telegram from G.H.Q. ordering an immediate retirement on Bavai. The short advance was over, the great retreat had begun.

In order to appreciate the full significance of the events that were taking place, it is necessary to look at the map of Europe and to understand the German plan of campaign. There was nothing new about this plan. It had been drawn up many years before, and had lain hidden in the archives of the German War Ministry, while its outlines had been imprinted on the minds of those who held the highest commands. Its author was Count Alfred Schlieffen, and in its strength and its simplicity it bears the stamp of military genius.

The portion of France between Switzerland and Belgium was believed, and was later proved, to be impregnable. The gap in the fortifications between Toul and Epinal was too obvious a lure to deceive the meanest intelligence. In order, therefore, to invade France, neutrality must be violated and there could be no hesitation in choosing between the Swiss mountains and the Belgian plains. Schlieffen himself had contemplated the invasion of both Holland and Belgium. He had anticipated that the violation of Dutch neutrality by Germany might bring about an immediate violation of Belgian neutrality by France, and that, in this manner, the political discredit attaching to a treaty breaker would be equally shared between the two countries. The original plan had undergone some modification at the hands of Moltke, but the outline of it remained.

When, therefore, the vast colossus of the German Army, far larger than the best information had reported it could possibly be, rolled up against the impenetrable barrier of the Franco-German frontier, there took place a gesture which, curiously enough, had been foreseen by British writers,

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had been foretold to the Cabinet by Lord Kitchener, had been explained as probable in the Staff College for twenty years, but for which the French General Staff was entirely unprepared. From Thionville, in the north-east corner of France, the German Army suddenly thrust out a terrible right arm. With this right arm it sought to accomplish a vast encircling movement, sweeping away in the first few days the loyal but pitiful resistance of Belgium, encompassing in its vast stretch a line from Ghent through Amiens to the south-west of Paris, and so encircling the whole of the French Army and driving it back to its own destruction against its eastern frontier, where it would find the remainder of the German forces waiting eagerly to receive it and complete its annihilation.

The reports which had been disturbing Haig all these days, and of which he had thought too little notice was taken at General Headquarters, were those which told of German troops still pouring westwards and threatening both the Channel ports and the left flank of the allied armies. These troops formed, in fact, the extended and ever extending right hand of the encircling enemy, and when they were compelled by the British advance to pause, to contract and to fight, it was nothing less than the clenched fist of the huge German Army that struck the five Divisions of the Expeditionary Force full in the face.

Nor was it only the strength of that fist and the reserve of force lying behind it that rendered it so formidable. A graver danger lay in the fact that the arm was not yet extended to its full length. It was capable of stretching farther and, in doing so, of turning the flank of its opponents. An army with its flank turned is lost.

Meanwhile the French offensive, of which Henry Wilson had spoken so optimistically, had already taken place while he was speaking. Schlieffen had foreseen this attack, and

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had welcomed it as warmly as a boxer with his right arm free would welcome the head of his opponent under his left shoulder. In the event, however, this attack had proved even less successful than Schlieffen had anticipated. The advance of the French centre, consisting of their Third and Fourth Armies, would have rendered the withdrawal of their left wing, the Fifth Army and the British Expeditionary Force, even more disastrous. But they had attacked and been defeated on August 21st. They were now in retreat, and it was their retreat and the retreat of the Fifth Army combined with the encircling movement of the First and Second German Armies on the left of our line which had placed the British forces in such fearful jeopardy when Haig was awakened at two o'clock in the morning of Monday, August 24th.

## Chapter VII

### RETREAT

Haig's orders were to retreat at once on Bavai, where a defensive position was to be taken up—the I Corps was to cover the retirement of the II Corps. As the II Corps, against whom the principal attack of the enemy had been concentrated during the previous day, were on the left of the I Corps, it would have been necessary, in order to carry out literally the orders received, for the I Corps to execute a flank march in the face of the enemy, a dangerous and possibly a disastrous manoeuvre, similar to that for which French had given instructions the year before at the Aldershot manoeuvres, when Grierson, his Chief of Staff, had demurred. Haig therefore interpreted his instructions in the light of his own knowledge, and lost no time in carrying them out.

“I decide:

(a) to organise a rearguard under General Horne, consisting of 5th Cavalry Bde. 2 battalions of infantry . . . 2 brigades R.F.A. to concentrate near the cross roads south of Le Bonnet, and to take the offensive at daybreak, with the object of delaying and misleading the enemy's leading troops.

(b) under cover of this attack, 2nd Divn, to move to a position N.W. of Le Bonnet, while the 1st Divn. with-

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draws westwards and holds the Villers-Sire-Nicole position (as arranged by me on the 22nd, but orders from G.H.Q. upset this).

(c) meantime trains, Divisional ammunition columns, ambulances, etc., to move off by two roads to Bavai.

"I at once motored to Corps H.Q. at Le Bonnet and dictated orders as above to Colonels Jeudwine and Neil Malcolm, then I went on in car to cross roads about 3 miles north of Le Bonnet. Gen. Monro had his H.Q. here in a little shop or auberge by the wayside. Gave Monro orders in above sense and marked his map, as he and his Staff Officer (Col. Gordon) were very sleepy.

"... It was now about 3 a.m. Baird and I then motored by direct road to Givry. Owing to a barricade in the village, we mistook the turn in the dark to General Davies's H.Q. (6th Bde.) and went for a short way towards the enemy's lines. We soon detected our mistake. I saw Gen. Davies and some of his staff; all very tired and sleepy. I told him to cancel the orders which he had given for a move forward and instead to be ready to carry out an order to retire on Le Bonnet which would soon reach him from H.Q. 2nd Divn. I then went on to Gen. Lomax at the Château of Rouveroy. All were still asleep here. I woke up Col. Fanshawe (his C.G.S.) and gave him full details of the change of plans. The road from Givry to Rouveroy was encumbered with transport, but I was able to see Gen. Bulfin and Gen. Davies on my way back as I passed Givry, and was back at Le Bonnet before 4 a.m. Thanks to the motor I was able to give personal orders to all the chief commanders concerned in the operations in the space of an hour, and enable them to cancel the orders which their troops were on the point of carrying out for a forward movement. Written orders reached them later, but the movement in retreat was started on certain definite lines in a way which

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would have been impossible by written orders and without the help of a motor.

"Thanks to the offensive action of the cavalry and artillery, the enemy's pursuit was delayed and the 2nd Divn. was thus enabled to reach the Bonnet position unmolested. The 1st Divn. passed in the rear of it and the 2nd Divn. then gradually withdrew on Bavai. Meanwhile the 6th Bde. (Davies), which I had at first withdrawn into reserve near Quévy, was ordered to take up an outpost line on the Longueville-Bavai position. These measures for withdrawal proved completely successful.

"At 11.10 a.m. Brig.-General Horne was able to report that the special responsibility of his rear guard seemed to be at an end, and that he was returning his infantry and field artillery to the 2nd Divn. Our retreat thus began smoothly and in good order and continued like 'a peace march' a French officer said to me.

"I spent the morning at Le Bonnet, Sir John French came to see me there, evidently very anxious, but was reassured at seeing the orderly way in which the retreat of my troops was proceeding. I took him to some rising ground about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile N.W. of Le Bonnet whence the enemy's shelling was plainly visible. The attack to the north seemed also very heavy.

"General Davies (6th Inf. Bde.) reported personally to me at the X roads just south of Malplaquet, where I had opened a report centre. He (Davies) stated that no entrenchments of any consequence had yet been prepared, that the Bavai position was a very bad one, and that even a moderately strong outpost line to cover the proposed position did not exist. I at once ordered my H.Q. to move from Bavai to Vieux Mesnil (5 miles south east of Bavai) and then proceeded to Bavai. On the way I satisfied myself that Davies's opinion regarding the unsuitability of the

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proposed position was sound. I reached Bavai about 4 p.m. and at once reported personally to Sir John French at the Mairie. I called his attention to the strong outflanking movement which the enemy was evidently making towards the west, and I told him in the presence of his C.G.S. (Murray) that, in my opinion, if our comparatively small force halted as proposed at Bavai, we ran great risk of being surrounded by the enemy. To this the Field Marshal replied that 'Smith-Dorrien had just stated that his troops could march no farther; that they could not march on the following day, but must halt for rest.' The Field Marshal, however, agreed with me as to the grave risk we would incur if we were to halt and decided to march next day. I was accordingly directed to leave the direct route from Bavai to Le Cateau to Smith-Dorrien, and to arrange to march by roads on the south of the Second Corps. By Gen. Murray's request I went off and worked out the details of the movement of the First Corps for the next day, giving the direct route to Le Cateau to the Second Corps.

"Rooms had been arranged for us in a charming house in Bavai. We were given tea, and I wrote a note to Murray proposing to start at 5 a.m. tomorrow 'by the roads near the Sambre, so that our head will reach Landrecies'. I sent this over to the Mairie by Captain Charteris (my A.D.C.) and received approval.

"It was now 6 p.m. I rode on to Vieux Mesnil. It was dark before we got there. I was billeted in an indifferent farm. When I got to my room I turned very sick with diarrhoea and continued in this condition for two hours. I then went to sleep."

Haig had every reason to feel satisfied with the manner in which he had been able to carry out his orders during this, the first day of the retreat, but it was little wonder that his exhausted constitution revolted under the strain that

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had been placed upon it. After barely two hours' sleep he had risen at 2 a.m., and had been constantly on the move ever since, giving orders to officers even more weary than himself, orders upon the exact performance of which depended the salvation of his whole command. It is difficult to appreciate how great must have been the mental as well as the physical strain. Yet this was only the first and not the most fatiguing of many similar days.

The next morning the retreat continued. Haig was feeling better, but decided to travel by motor car. It now became necessary for the I and II Corps temporarily to lose touch with one another, as the Forest of Mormal, which lay on their line of march, contained no good roads running from north to south. The II Corps therefore proceeded to the west of the forest in the direction of Le Cateau, while the I Corps remained to the east of it, crossing the Sambre near Maubeuge and heading for Landrecies.

Haig himself reached Landrecies in the afternoon, and was preparing to set up his Headquarters there for the night, when a panic occurred among the inhabitants, who rushed into the room where he was sitting, crying that the enemy were upon them. Unaware how much truth there might be in these reports, he moved to the Mairie, as being in the most central position, and prepared to defend the town. Mounted patrols were sent out to reconnoitre, but did not succeed in finding any trace of the enemy. It seemed that the alarm had been entirely false until about seven-thirty, when a company of the Coldstream, which was defending the road leading into the town, was violently attacked. About the same time a few miles away to the north-east a large party of the enemy emerged from the forest of Mormal, captured a bridge over the Sambre which was held by a troop of the 15th Hussars, and resisted every effort to retake it.



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It is possible that, from the information which reached them, Haig and his staff formed an exaggerated estimate of the forces that were opposed to them. Darkness had fallen and the countryside, from which the civilian inhabitants had had no time to flee, was alive with rumours of the most alarming kind. Secret agents were doubtless engaged in fomenting panic. It is significant that on this same day a precisely similar panic occurred at Prisches in the zone of the French Fifth Army. Confusion was increased by the action of the Germans who, relying on the British soldiers' lack of experience, on two occasions gained initial advantage by pretending to be French. Haig recognised such tactics as a legitimate ruse of war, and admired the courage of those who employed them.

About ten o'clock he considered the situation sufficiently serious to justify an appeal to G.H.Q. for reinforcements. French transmitted the request to Smith-Dorrien, who was compelled to reply that his troops were quite unable to move that night. At that very moment, in fact, Smith-Dorrien was engaged in taking the momentous decision to disregard the wishes of his superior officer and to stand and fight at Le Cateau.

In ignorance of this important fact Haig, at 12.30 a.m. in the early morning of August 26th, issued orders for the continuation of the retirement in a southerly direction. General Landon, commanding the 3rd Brigade, whose Headquarters were at Le Grand Fayt, was to be the first to move, and his troops were to take up a position west of Favril in order to cover the withdrawal of the 4th (Guards) Brigade from Landrecies. "Landon gave his men a meal, some tea, biscuits, cheese, etc., about 2 a.m., and I saw them start off about 3 a.m. just as it was getting light. The platoons of the South Wales Borderers gave a cheer as they went past me.

## RETREAT

"We had some biscuits and some rum and hot water as we waited at Le Grand Fayt, taken from the supplies dumped for the troops at the side of the road.

"Landon reached the position ordered near Favril without incident. A hot shell fire was soon opened on him, but they held their ground without difficulty. By 5 a.m. I heard that the 4th (Guards) Brigade had successfully withdrawn from Landrecies and was about halfway between that place and Etreux.

"At 6 a.m. when I was still at Le Grand Fayt, Major Dawnay (communication officer between G.H.Q. and my H.Q.) arrived from General Headquarters and gave me instructions that the First Corps was to retire either on St. Quentin, or in a south-easterly direction in conjunction with the French; in the latter case it would have to rejoin the rest of the Expeditionary Force by train. I felt that I could not do more than I had already done to comply with the spirit of these orders, and I considered it best to allow the movements of the Corps to proceed on the lines which I had already laid down.

"Unfortunately direct communication with the Second Corps was cut off, and touch was not regained until the First Corps reached Villers-Cotterets on the 1st September."

A serious disaster occurred between 5 and 6 that evening to the 2nd Connaught Rangers, who were forming the rear guard of the 5th Brigade, and who, while passing through Le Grand Fayt, which they had been informed was clear of the enemy, were suddenly fired on from the houses and suffered very severe casualties. Haig did not learn of this until the following day and so far as his knowledge went on the evening of the 26th the retreat had been very successfully conducted. "General Gough and I", so concludes his entry, "spent the night in a small inn on the main road just west of Iron. An old man and his

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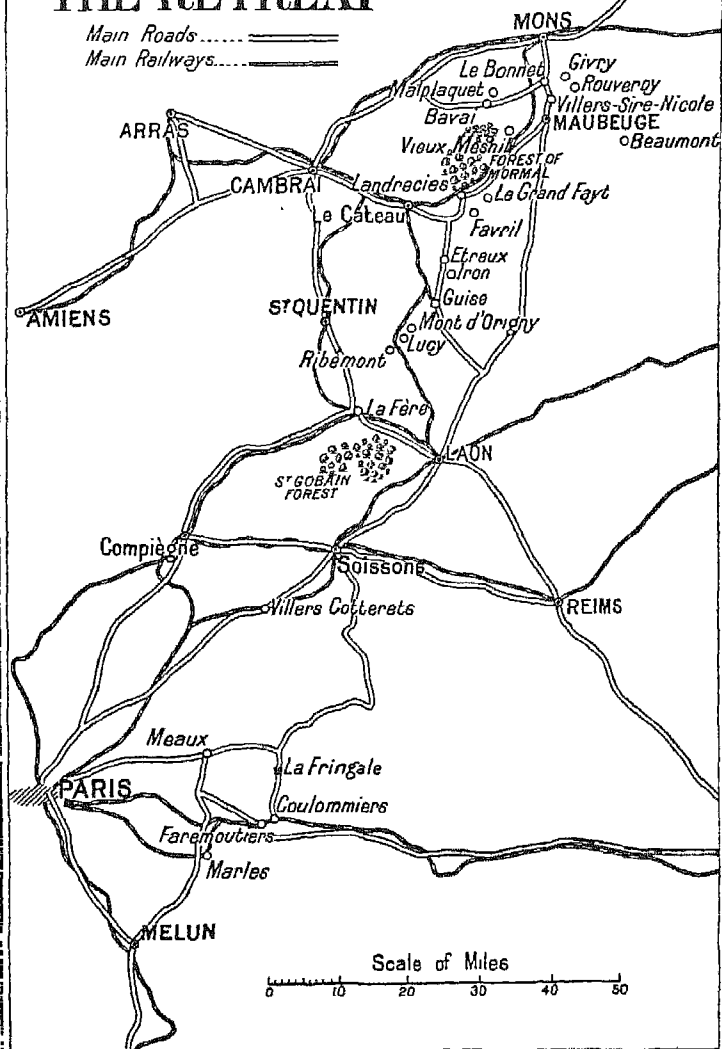
daughter gave us an excellent dinner of fried eggs and stewed rabbit."

So the I Corps passed in comparative calm the day of August 26th, during which the II Corps was fighting for its life at Le Cateau, and so it happened that the small British Army was cut into two halves, and that for a whole week the one half had no knowledge of what the other half was doing. Yet both were in communication with G.H.Q. At 8.30 on that same evening of August 26th Haig telegraphed to G.H.Q. "No news of Second Corps except sound of guns from direction of Le Cateau and Beaumont. Can First Corps be of any assistance?" To this message G.H.Q. sent no reply, so that Haig telegraphed again, sending his message to the Second Corps through G.H.Q., as the most rapid means of transmission, "Please let me know your situation and news. We are well able to co-operate with you today, we could hear the sound of your battle, but could get no information as to its progress, and could form no idea how we could assist you." Again there was no reply. As the Official Historian justly observes, "At this hour G.H.Q. seem to have given up the Second Corps as lost." But, in fact, the Second Corps had fought on that day, the anniversary of Crécy, a battle not less remarkable as a feat of arms nor less important in its effect upon history.

The morning of August 27th broke grey and gloomy. Heavy storms of rain fell at intervals throughout the day while the melancholy retreat of the I Corps continued. The soldiers knew nothing of the heroic battle that their comrades had fought the day before, they had never heard of the Schlieffen plan, nor could they understand the vast implications of the strategical situation; they only knew that they were weary to death, footsore and sleepless, and that they had still to retreat before the enemy, whom they longed to fight and who were pressing relentlessly on their

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Main Roads.....  
Main Railways.....



Stanford, London



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heels. On this day a battalion of the Munster Fusiliers, acting as part of the rear guard, became detached from the main body of the 1st (Guards) Brigade, and after fighting for nearly twelve hours against overwhelming odds perished almost to a man. The situation was further complicated by the lack of roads and by the demands of the Fifth French Army, retiring on the right, for a fair share of them. Nevertheless good progress was made, and the troops bivouacked and billeted for the night on the high ground south of Guise as far as Mont d'Origny.

That night Haig considered the situation so critical that he decided to resume the march at 4 a.m., although it was quite evident that many men would get little or no rest.

"I rode off myself about 2.30 a.m., night dark and misty, and found some units (Artillery and Royal Engineers) without orders. Staff Officers as well as troops were so dead tired it was most difficult to get orders understood and delivered to troops and then carried out.

"As the sun rose the day became very hot. The men were daily becoming weaker from want of rest, and from not having sufficient time properly to prepare their food, and the strain of the daily skirmishes and of the continual retirement was beginning to be severely felt. Anxiety and fatigue were also telling on the minds and bodies of Commanders as well as on their Staff Officers. Nevertheless a march of nearly 22 miles was made by some units and at night the First Corps halted between La Fère and the St. Gobain Forest.

"About 2 p.m. the C.-in-C. (Sir John French) came to La Fère and visited the troops, giving them their first authentic account of the fighting at Le Cateau."

It is interesting to compare Haig's own account of the condition of his troops on August 28th with that of an independent foreign witness. Captain Helbronner, a member

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of the staff of General Lanrezac, commanding the Fifth French Army, came with a message from his Chief to the effect that he intended to give battle to the enemy on the morrow and wished to know whether he could rely upon the support of his Allies.

"The men of the First Corps", he reported, "were tired and suffering from the extreme heat, but they marched in perfect order. The regiments went by ceaselessly singing Tipperary. . . ." He later encountered some regiments of the II Corps—"which presented", he wrote, "a striking contrast to the First Corps. The men looked harassed, there was some disorder and some units were intermingled. Nobody was singing. . . ." On his way back he met General Monro, commanding the 2nd Division, who was "jovial and in excellent temper, but was not shaved, an exceptional thing for a British officer".<sup>1</sup>

Helbronner found the I Corps Commander himself north of Ribemont near the village of Lucy, and thus describes the interview: "He was standing on a mound, an orderly holding the horses beside the lance carrying the pennon, red with a white cross, which was planted on the ground. A British airman was reporting to Sir Douglas, who was very animated and conveyed to me the news he had just received. . . . This was that important German columns had been observed advancing south-west of St. Quentin. General Haig was good enough to mark these himself in pencil on my map. His words to me were 'Go quickly to your General and give him this information. Let him take advantage of it without delay. The enemy is exposing his flank as he advances. Let him act. I am anxious to co-operate with him in his attack.'"

Helbronner hastened back to Lanrezac with the welcome news. Lanrezac had indeed already decided to assume the

<sup>1</sup> See *Liaison*, by Brigadier-General E. L. Spears, pages 263-264.

## RETREAT

offensive on the morrow in accordance with orders that he had received from Joffre. He now sent Helbronner back to Haig in order to complete the arrangements for Anglo-French co-operation. Haig realised with regret that his infantry would not be in a condition to take the field until they had had a few hours' rest in order to recover from the incredible exertions of the last few days. But he was most anxious to lend our Allies such assistance as was in his power. Accordingly he despatched the following message to G.H.Q., "Reference by General Lanrezac for support of our First Corps on left of attack which begins at 5.30 a.m. tomorrow, I replied that Infantry must have day's rest, but that support by the whole artillery and machine guns of the Corps with suitable infantry escort could be given provided Field Marshal approves.

"Infantry would be ready to support tomorrow evening and in any case could join in pursuit.

"Please telephone Sir John French's instructions. I consider infantry will be able to go forward after 24 hours rest."

Having sent off the message at 7 p.m., Haig invited Captain Helbronner to dine with him while awaiting the reply. It was not slow in coming and was to the following effect: "Commander-in-Chief does not approve of any active operations on the part of our First Corps tomorrow and has already ordered a halt for one day's rest."

To a further request that he might be authorised to give merely artillery support, the reply came: "The Commander-in-Chief repeats the order that no active operations of any arms except of a defensive nature will be undertaken tomorrow."

So the first opportunity for successful co-operation between the Allies was missed. On the following day General Lanrezac scored a considerable success, but no British troops



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took part in the action and no British regiment can include the Battle of Guise among its battle honours.

August 29th was designed to be a day of rest for the British, but it did not prove one for the Commander of the I Corps. At 5 a.m. he was aroused by the following message from G.H.Q., "Please be good enough to inform C.-in-C. how it was that any confidential promise of support by First Corps was made to General Lanrezac or why any official exchange of ideas was initiated without authority from Headquarters."

To this hasty and ill-tempered protest conveyed by telegraph, Haig replied in a confidential letter dated 7 a.m.

"I do not understand what you mean. I have 'initiated no official exchange of ideas.'

"G.H.Q. not having secured from the French roads for the retirement of my Corps, I had for my own safety to enter into relations with the nearest French force on my right. As far as it was possible I have maintained touch with the left of these French troops—and due to the presence of this Corps their left has been protected ever since we left Maubeuge.

"My Corps in its present position still protects their left, and if the enemy advances from St. Quentin southwards, I shall have for my own safety to deploy guns, etc., without asking for the authority of G.H.Q. to do so.

"The extrication of this Corps from the false position in which it was placed still demands the greatest exertion from us all, and my sole objective is to secure its retreat with honour to our arms. I therefore beg you will not give credit to such allegations as the one under reference without first ascertaining whether it is true or not."

This reply was devastating and left French with no alternative but to apologise, which he did verbally at their next meeting. This took place on the afternoon of the same day,

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Haig being compelled to drive 35 miles on a bad and hilly road, and back again, in order to attend a conference at Compiègne where it was decided that the retreat must be continued. He did not get back to his Headquarters until 8.30 that night, only to set forth once more at 3.30 on the following morning.

The next day the retreat continued and Corps Headquarters that night were in a château two miles south-west of Soissons. On August 31st the whole Corps crossed the Aisne and billeted on the south side of it, Headquarters being removed to Villers-Cotterets. "It was daily becoming more evident", Haig wrote that day, "that, unless some special arrangement were made for reducing the weight carried by the men, the Corps would not be able to continue its march for many more days without seriously impairing its value as a fighting force. I therefore decided to send off by train from Villers-Cotterets about half of the ammunition carried by the Divisional ammunition columns, and make use of the waggons to carry kits and exhausted men. In this way fifty waggons per Division were released and were placed at the disposal of the Divisional Commanders. This was an extreme measure, but having regard to the nature of the operations in which we were engaged, there seemed to be no likelihood of requiring even half the amount of ammunition normally carried by the Divisional ammunition columns. In the end this arrangement was more than justified by the result."

It was anticipated that the Germans would make a great effort on September 1st to commemorate in a suitable manner the victory of Sedan. In point of fact, although the fighting was severe and the losses of the 4th (Guards) Brigade in an heroic rearguard action were very heavy, the end of the day, during which a further stage in the retreat had been accomplished, seemed to leave the situation materially

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unaltered. But three events of first-class importance for the future conduct of the war had actually taken place.

French, as has been seen from his action on the night of August 28th, had reached a state of mind in which he could think only of the preservation of his own Force. He had abandoned any immediate intention of further co-operation with his Allies and decided to retire altogether from the fighting line, to retreat to the south of the Seine and with his base at La Rochelle to await future developments.

Kitchener was horrified at French's decision, and the British Cabinet shared his dismay. In the very early morning, therefore, of September 1st, he left London for Paris where he met French in the course of the day. The result of their conversation was that French abandoned his previously declared purpose of quitting the fighting line, and agreed to conform to the best of his ability to the wishes of Joffre and the movements of the French Army.

On the previous day the extreme right wing of the invading host, the First German Army, under Kluck, definitely altered the line of their advance from a southern to a south-easterly direction. It is said that Schlieffen, the originator of the plan of campaign, exclaimed on his death bed, "It must come to a fight. Only make the right wing strong," and we have seen how strong it was when the British Army first encountered it on the 23rd August. But Moltke, the German Commander-in-Chief, instead of strengthening had weakened it. In spite of the victory at Tannenberg on August 28th, no troops had been transferred from the Eastern to the Western Front; in spite of the failure of the First and Second French Armies in their attacks on the left of the German line, no reinforcements had been sent to the right. The result was that that strong right fist was no longer so firmly clenched. The fingers were becoming looser, at any moment they might begin to flap,

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and the consciousness of weakness naturally produced a tendency to draw in towards the central body as being the fountain of strength. And so the original grand conception of the vast sweeping movement that was to have brought the extreme right to the south of the Seine, and to have included Paris in its huge embrace, was abandoned in favour of a little stab that seemed for the moment to promise an easier and swifter victory.

A further important decision was taken on the 1st of September which was to have some influence on the events to come. Joffre decided to reinforce the troops defending Paris, and in order to do so he incorporated the whole of the Sixth Army and one corps of the Third Army with its garrison. At the same time he advised the Government to leave for Bordeaux. They did so on the following day. The result was that on the 2nd September, General Galliéni, the Military Governor of Paris, had fewer politicians at his elbow and more troops under his command.

For four more days the long retreat continued. Each morning the corps marched before daybreak always with the knowledge that the enemy were at their heels and frequently exposed to shell fire. When they arrived at their destination the heavy labours of the staff began, making arrangements for the next day's move and distributing billets for the next night's rest. On the 2nd Haig slept at Meaux which was "like a city of the dead—no one moving in the streets except some aged men and women". The next night he stayed at La Fringale—"a shooting box, evidently used by a syndicate of sportsmen from Paris". Thence still farther south to a château at Faremoutiers, three miles south-west of Coulommiers.

There the "night passed quietly except for attack by troops of Uhlans on an outpost of the Black Watch near Aulnoy. Canny Scots, they had stretched a strand of barbed

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wire across the main road so that, when the German horsemen charged down and tried to gallop through the picket in the dark, the horses tripped up, eight Uhlans were killed and the officer was captured."

On September 5th troops marched as usual at 3 a.m. in a south-westerly direction towards Melun. The day was cooler and there was more life in the men. At the village of Marles Haig paused for breakfast which he had with his staff in an orchard adjoining the church. It was while he was sitting there under the trees that Major Dawnay arrived with a message from the Commander-in-Chief. It contained the information, long desired, that on the morrow the allied forces were to turn on their pursuers. "The Army on the 6th September will advance eastwards with a view to attacking."

"No words", wrote Haig, "could have been more welcome to the troops. For thirteen days, broken only by a short rest at St. Gobain, the First Corps had retreated without a check and had fought a continuous series of rearguard actions, some of them serious. The total distance covered was not less than 160 miles, and there was not a man in the force who had not covered considerably more than this distance. The total losses in action throughout this period were 81 officers and 2180 non-commissioned officers and men. These figures, however, give no idea of the demands which were made upon the force under my command. The actual fighting was the least of our difficulties."

But now at last the retreat was over, the bitter pilgrimage had reached its bourne, and that night the army slept with the thought of battle and the hope of victory in their hearts.

## Chapter VIII

### MARNE AND AISNE

It has already been explained how on August 31st the extreme right wing of the German invading forces, the First Army under Kluck, had altered their line of advance in a south-easterly direction. The wide sweep had been abandoned in favour of the short thrust, and the encircling arm, which was to have included the whole field of battle and all the forces engaged within its circumference, had, by narrowing its orbit, allowed itself in turn to become encircled. The British Army had retreated to the south-east of Paris; Kluck by pursuing it in that direction had put Paris with its garrison on his right flank; and Joffre's first action on learning of Kluck's movement had been to increase the garrison of Paris, placing the whole of the French Sixth Army under Galliéni's command.

It is unnecessary here to revive the controversy as to whether it was Joffre or Galliéni who first appreciated the value of the opportunity which the German movement had given to the Allied Armies. Suffice it to say that little time was lost in coming to the decision that the moment had arrived to turn on the pursuers, and on September 6th the whole of the allied line advanced.

Haig used sometimes to say that he never knew there had been a battle of the Marne, and on this, the first day of it, the I Corps certainly experienced very little serious fighting.

## MARNE AND AISNE

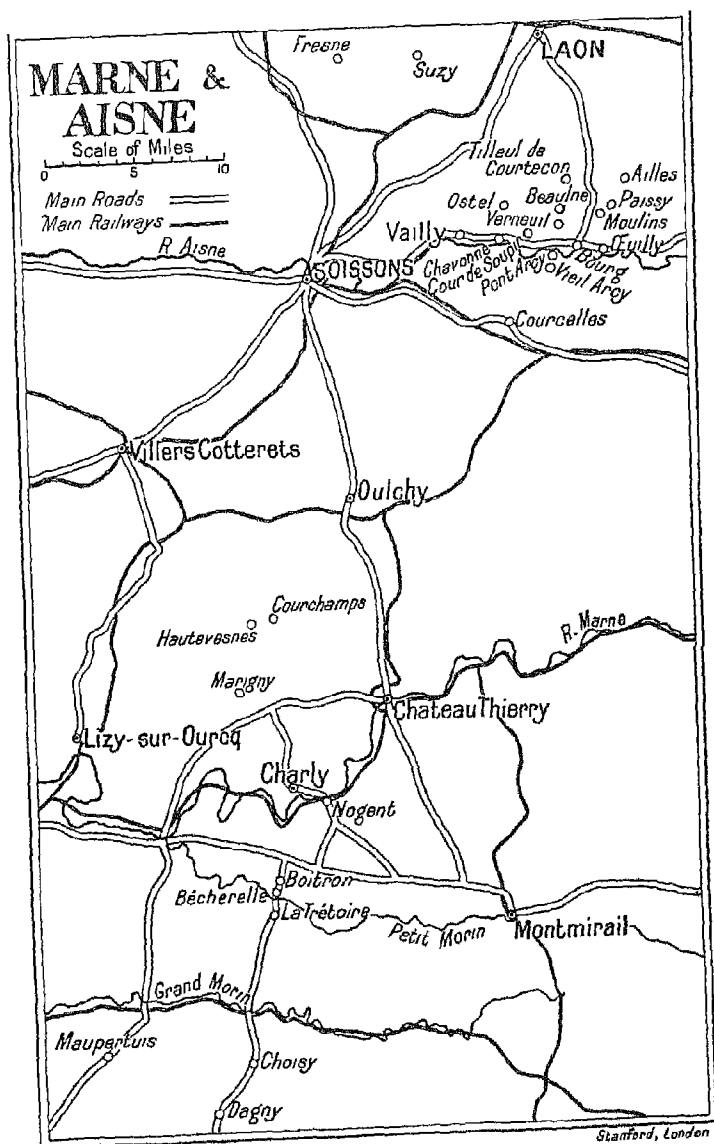
At 9 a.m. they were drawn up facing a little to the north of due east in readiness to advance, and news was received at Corps Headquarters that the 1st Brigade on the extreme right was engaged with the enemy. Haig ordered the Commander of the 1st Division to give artillery support. He hesitated to order a general advance because the wooded country on his left front was reported to be full of Germans, and the II Corps on his left was still five miles behind the I Corps. He was glad, therefore, when French arrived at his Headquarters and agreed to send immediate orders to the II Corps to advance.

In the course of the morning, although the advance of the British was meeting with resistance, reports of air reconnaissance began to arrive to the effect that very large bodies of the enemy had been observed moving in a northerly direction. Rightly surmising that the resistance was merely a screen to cover a general retirement, Haig encouraged the I Corps to press vigorously forward, and in the afternoon gave orders that the "advance was to be continued until 6.30 p.m., when divisions were to halt, covered by outposts, on the ground which they then occupied".

"The losses on this day were: killed, 1 officer and 6 other ranks; wounded, 5 officers and 39 other ranks; but the importance of the operations, marking as they did the extreme limit of the Germans' advance, followed immediately by his retreat, was quite out of proportion to the casualties."

As it was now evident that the enemy were in full retreat Haig was most anxious to lose no unnecessary time in pressing the pursuit and chafed at delays which he considered might have been avoided.

"At 6.45 a.m. (no orders having been received from G.H.Q.) I ordered divisions to advance to the line Mauper-







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tuis-Dagny, with advanced guards beyond. Operation orders were not actually issued from G.H.Q. till 8 a.m. on the 7th and reached me at 9 a.m. . . .

"I thought our movements very slow today, in view of the fact that the enemy was on the run. I motored and saw both Lomax and Monro and impressed on them the necessity for quick and immediate action."

The Corps bivouacked that night along the south bank of the Grand Morin, a tributary of the Marne. Haig slept in a house at Choisy where German officers had been billeted a few nights before. "A German General slept in my room. Before he left he put his foot through the looking-glass in the wardrobe—Hardly a manly act! The poor woman in charge was much upset."

The advance was resumed at 6 a.m. on September 8th. Having crossed the Grand Morin without difficulty the Corps was confronted by a more formidable obstacle in the Petit Morin, another small river flowing between steep and high banks, where the enemy put up a more determined resistance. The German superiority in numbers of machine guns and the use they made of them provided the British Army with a useful lesson. "The enemy's guns and cavalry", wrote Haig, "did not long remain in action, but the machine guns were handled with great skill and resolution. In the closely wooded valley they afforded no target to our artillery and, whenever our infantry advanced, fire was opened from some unexpected direction, sometimes from the woods, sometimes from windows."

The passage of a river with high banks in the face of determined opposition must always be a difficult operation. Haig was *himself* very near the front firing line throughout the morning of this day and personally encouraged the troops going forward to the assault. The 2nd Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment were the first of the infantry

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of the I Corps to cross the river at the bridge near Bécherelle and, strongly supported by two Battalions of the Guards, they compelled the enemy to retire from the northern bank. This was about midday, and thereafter, although the fighting was hard, the position was secure.

Haig was ready to appreciate the gallantry and quick to note the efficiency of the opposing forces—"The enemy certainly made a gallant defence. We captured eight machine guns of the Guard Cavalry Division and the last of the Guard Jaeger Battalion was destroyed here. The poor fellows had been left to hold the position until orders were sent to them to retire, but of course there was no intention of ordering them back. We got 200 to 300 prisoners and must have killed or wounded another 200 or more.

"The roads south of Boitron were so covered with transport and troops that I rode back via La Trétoire and passed several positions taken up by the enemy. They were very cleverly prepared and occupied. A sunken road and high hedge running down into the valley had been occupied by eight guns in line; strong parapets had been made behind the hedge which completely hid the guns. From this point the approaches down the far bank to the bridge, and the bridge itself, were commanded. I saw many dead in this part of the position.

"It was dark when I got back to the cross roads south of La Trétoire. We spent the night in a small farm half a mile west of the cross roads."

After the difficulty which the I Corps had experienced in crossing the Petit Morin they naturally anticipated that the Marne would prove a far more formidable obstacle. A broad river with few bridges and many houses on its banks, it offered to a retreating army ideal opportunities for fighting rearguard actions. But when the I Corps

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reached the bridges they found that the enemy had disappeared and, although elaborate barricades had been erected which took as long as two hours to remove, the advance guard of the 1st Division had crossed the Marne at Nogent by 7.30 a.m. on September 9th. Soon afterwards the 2nd Division effected a crossing farther west at Charly.

Eager as Haig was to lose no time in pursuing the enemy, three causes in the course of this day produced unnecessary delay. "About noon Second Corps reported that an aeroplane had discovered a large force of the enemy on the line Marigny-Château Thierry. I therefore ordered my advanced guard to halt and hold a position covering the crossings at Charly and Nogent."

At the same time Haig learnt that the Fifth French Army on his right were moving away from him to the north-east, leaving a gap which would have proved a serious danger if the information just received had proved correct.

"I sent out, therefore, special aeroplane reconnaissances, and soon I was able to send word to my two Divisions to continue the march and that the enemy seemed to be in full retreat."

A third contretemps, however, occurred owing to these orders being delivered verbally to General Monro who misunderstood them and ordered the whole of his Division to retire. Fortunately Haig met them on the road and was able to turn them all to the right about before much time had been lost. Later in the day he met some cavalry moving at a walk and delaying the advance of the infantry. When he caught up the officer commanding them he "explained to him that a little effort now might mean the conclusion of the war. The enemy was running back. It was the duty of each one of us to strain every effort to keep him on the run."

These extracts serve to show how fully Haig appreciated

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the vital importance of swift action at this juncture, how little it is in the power of one corps commander to accomplish, and how immense are the difficulties in the way of any rapid movement when operations are on so vast a scale.

For three more days the pursuit of the rapidly retreating German Army continued. On September 10th the First Corps marched at 5 a.m. It was a misty morning and low-lying clouds made air reconnaissance impossible. When therefore Haig learnt from General de Maud'huy, commanding the French XVIII Corps on his right that a column of fifty-four German heavy guns was moving from Lizy-sur-Ourcq towards Oulchy he was unable either to confirm the information or, owing to the heads of his two columns being engaged, to co-operate in their capture. The country was hilly, the roads were wet and slippery, and the rear guards of the enemy were still fighting fiercely. The advance was therefore delayed and many casualties were incurred, but Haig estimated that during the day his Corps had caused the loss of 1000 men to the enemy, six guns and many machine guns. His Headquarters that night were at Hautevesnes where he arrived after dark.

On September 11th the whole of the British Expeditionary Force wheeled in a north-easterly direction. The I Corps being on the right had therefore a comparatively short march. This action was taken in accordance with a request received from General Joffre. "Personally," wrote Haig, "I think it is a mistake to have changed direction now, because the enemy on our front was close to us last night and was much exhausted. Had we advanced today on Soissons, with cavalry on both flanks, large captures seemed likely."

All the evidence that has subsequently come to light confirms the view that Haig's appreciation of the position was

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the correct one. We know now from narratives such as Captain Bloem's *Advance from Mons* how utterly wornout were the German troops; we know from official reports how wide was the gap between the First and the Second German Armies and how lightly it was defended; and it is impossible, in light of the facts that are now available, to avoid the conclusion that an opportunity was missed which might have brought the war to a sudden and dramatic conclusion. From the moment that the German advance was turned into a retreat, those in Germany who properly understood the situation realised that the great plan had failed. It had depended for its success upon swiftness of execution. If the war of rapid action were to become a war of slow attrition the superior resources of the Allies must tell in the end. If the retreat from the Marne, difficult as it was to explain, had been followed by a spectacular defeat, it is not impossible that in Germany the voice of sanity would have prevailed and peace would have been negotiated, for the Germans had no more envisaged and were no more prepared for four years of trench warfare than were the Allies.

But this was not to be. The Germans were accorded on September 11th and 12th that short but vital breathing space which enabled them to cross the Aisne, to recover their morale, and to adopt a strong position from which they could hold their ground and beat back their pursuers. "The evening of the 12th September", runs the diary, "marks the close of the second phase of this campaign. That phase comprises the sudden check of the enemy's forward movement towards Paris on the 6th September, followed by our advance which drove him back to the Aisne. During the seven days from the 6th to 12th September the First Corps acting in co-operation with the rest of the British Force on its left and with the French Fifth Army on its right,

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covered a distance of 70 miles, fought two important engagements—at the Petit Morin on the 8th and Hautevesnes and Courchamps on the 10th, captured 1000 prisoners, 2 field guns, 6 machine guns and other material. When it is remembered that these feats followed immediately on a long and exhausting retreat, it will be realised that the short-service regular army of today has nothing to fear from comparison with the long-service army of the last century.”

The obstacles which now presented themselves to the advancing British Army consisted not only of the swiftly running river Aisne with its steep and wooded banks and the greater part of its bridges broken, but also a formidable ridge of rising ground beyond it along which there stretched a road which was to prove memorable in the history of the war, Le Chemin des Dames.

The weather was bad, very cold for September, a high wind and torrents of rain. Soon after eight in the morning of September 13th the passage of the river was undertaken by the greater part of the Corps, the 1st Division crossing at Bourg and the 2nd at Pont Arcy. In the latter case it was only possible, owing to the destruction of the greater part of the bridge, to cross in single file, and much delay was thus incurred, the operation lasting throughout the day. By nightfall nearly the whole Corps had crossed the Aisne. They had been subjected to heavy shell fire, but their losses had not been excessive, and they bivouacked on the northern bank of the river.

The 14th September provided the I Corps with the hardest fighting they had yet experienced, and the heaviest casualties. It was also to furnish them with a foretaste of those apparently fruitless efforts with which both sides were to become so familiar in the years that followed.

*“Strong blows, but on the void, and toil without reward.”*

## MARNE AND AISNE

The orders that Haig received on the previous evening were typical of the optimism which now prevailed at G.H.Q. "The Army will continue the pursuit tomorrow at 6 a.m. and will act vigorously against the retreating enemy . . . the heads of Corps will reach the line Laon-Suzy-Fresne"—that was to say about twelve miles north of their actual position.

Haig could not share the confidence which dictated such orders—"About 3 to 4 miles north of the river, a considerable ridge (some 400 feet or more above the river) on which is the Chemin des Dames, runs east and west with spurs running southwards to the river. It seemed to me very necessary to have possession of this ridge before putting our transport north of the river. I therefore ordered that the first objective of the Corps during today's march was to gain possession of this ridge, and that no movement (except reconnaissances) should take place beyond that line until we had ascertained what progress the Division (the 3rd) on my left had made."

Long before dawn the 1st Division was on the move, advancing their artillery to the Paissy plateau, where it was hoped they would find a favourable position from which to assist the next advance. Unfortunately, however, when the day broke a "heavy mist hung over the hills hampering control and making loss of direction inevitable, as well as depriving the infantry of artillery support. Nevertheless the Corps pressed boldly forward in the face of determined opposition and made considerable progress. By noon the 1st Division had one regiment well north of the Chemin des Dames and the enemy were retreating before them. This was on the extreme right of the line where French infantry were also advancing. The 2nd Division had met with greater resistance, but their advance, although not so rapid, had been satisfactory.



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"At this time a young officer of the 15th Hussars (2-Lt. Straker) rode in to tell me that he had been reconnoitring on the left of the 6th Brigade toward Ostel village and Vailly; that he had seen a British gun limber and British infantry retreating hurriedly towards Vailly. These belonged to the 3rd Division which had come under hot shell fire just west of Chavonne. Fugitives said the 3rd Division had been driven back upon the river. I sent Charteris (my A.D.C.) in a motor to find out what the situation on my left was, but I could see the enemy's shells now bursting on the ridge which the 4th (Guards) Brigade was holding, so I concluded matters were not right there.

"I had no infantry to detach, especially as a counter-attack was advancing upon Monro's right front (Chivy) and Lomax was hotly engaged. I at once sent off a troop of 15th Hussars (Divisional Cavalry) which happened to be at hand, and my escort consisting of two troops of Irish Horse, with orders to reconnoitre west towards Vailly, to report situation and hold some position to cover left flank of Guards Brigade. A Brigade of Field Artillery and two heavy guns of 2nd Division were sent back across river to high ground west of Vieil-Arcy with orders to fire into the valley west of the ridge on which the 4th (Guards) Brigade was posted.

"I also sent for a Brigade of Cavalry to come from the Cavalry Division on my right to support my left flank.

"Sir J. French and Staff arrived at this time. I explained the situation; . . . Sir J. French was pleased with the forward position of my Corps.

"Shells now began to fall near where we were. High explosive ones which make a great noise but do little damage beyond the vicinity of the actual spot hit. So I moved my Headquarters back about a mile to the Canal Bridge south of Bourg village.

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"By 3.30 to 4 p.m. reports from different parts of the line began to show signs of improvement. After encountering heavy opposition in the woods, the 4th (Guards) Brigade had fought its way forward to the open ground where it came into contact with the Connaughts about 5.30 p.m. There it found a position through Cour de Soupir to the southern point of the spur, which afforded a clear field of fire for several hundred yards. In this advance through the woods the artillery had been able to give very little support to the infantry, except for one section which had been pushed right up to the firing line.

"With the left flank thus secured, General Monro was able to report that he hoped again to collect a reserve; the counter-attacks against the 1st Division became weaker; and news came in of a French advance on my right towards Ailles. It appeared to me that this was the moment for a general offensive all along my front. A few fresh troops to throw into the fight would have been invaluable, but none were available. Nevertheless, an advance was ordered in the hope of gaining the high ground of the Chemin des Dames before night. The forward movement began about sunset and the men, of whom many had been fighting hard since before daybreak, answered readily to my demand. They were met everywhere by very heavy rifle and gun fire. The 4th (Guards) Brigade found itself pinned by a counter-attack against the exposed left, and again the danger on this flank checked a great part of the line.

"The 1st Division on the right gained ground, but could not maintain itself in the face of the opposition encountered. Only in the centre the 5th Brigade, moving along the eastern slopes of the Beaulne ridges, was able to get forward and to continue its advance until it reached the ridge about Tilleul de Courtaçon. In the dark General Haking failed to get touch with the 1st Division, but his

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patrols found German outposts on both flanks. He consequently drew back his troops under cover of darkness to the neighbourhood of Verneuil."

As night fell upon the battlefield, Haig paid a visit to each of his divisional commanders. "Monro seemed quite confident and I complimented him on the fine behaviour of his troops under very critical conditions.

"I then rode on to see Lomax. I found him near Moulins village (about a 5-mile ride via Bourg village). It was dark and the old man was resting in his motor car as the enemy was then shelling the village where he had intended to spend the night. He seemed quite cheery, though very tired, and also very distressed at the severe losses his division had suffered. I told him that his action in capturing the ridge before daylight and the way his troops had attacked and then withstood the repeated attacks throughout the day was beyond all praise. I reminded him that it was by my orders that his troops had taken the offensive about 5 p.m. and two battalions of the 3rd Brigade were pushed up Chivy valley and then the whole line went forward. He then explained to me the situation. Practically all his troops were now extended and he had no reserve left. The situation was indeed critical if the enemy had any fresh troops to put into the battle!

"I told him to dig in and hold on. I would arrange for the French on my right and all the British on my left to take the offensive tomorrow.

"He told me of a few of his losses: 3 colonels of 1st Brigade, either killed or wounded. General Bulfin commanding 2nd Brigade was a tower of strength—'always cheerful and cool'. Jenkinson (Brigade Major of Landon's Brigade), a Staff College officer of great promise killed. The Colonel of the Sussex (Montessor) killed. On the other hand, what a splendid action they had fought, after

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so many trying weeks retreating and marching. They had indeed given their lives to save our fatherland. It will be hard to find a finer example of endurance and discipline in all the annals of British arms."

The following is Haig's description of the situation of the I Corps after the fighting of September 14th :

"The day's operations by my two divisions resulted in our gaining a foothold on about 4000 yards of front on the main ridge north of the River Aisne, with strong flanking ridges covering a permanent crossing over the river. It was, in fact, an admirable bridgehead, well suited for use as a pivot of manoeuvre for further offensive operations.

"The Corps also captured some 300 prisoners, 2 machine guns and 12 field guns. The guns, however, could not be moved, and were eventually recovered by the enemy after nightfall. The casualties were severe, approximately 160 officers, 3 500 other ranks, one brigade alone losing 3 of its 4 commanding officers. The chief difficulty met with lay in the wooded nature and steep slopes of the ground and the very accurate and effective fire of the enemy's heavy artillery; his infantry were no match for our troops.

"After the battle of the 14th September the idea of an immediate northward advance of the allied forces was gradually abandoned, and the line which had been gained by the First Corps as the result of an offensive battle had to be adapted for purposes of defence. The total length of this line from the right of the 2nd Brigade to point 166 north of Chavonne was not less than 12,000 yards, a very extended front to be held by a force of only two divisions, reduced by casualties against an active German enemy with large reserves to draw upon. The result was that until the arrival of some troops of the 5th Division on the 18th September only small local reserves could be kept in hand. It was, therefore, almost impossible to relieve the men in

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the trenches where, even when not attacked, they were subjected by night as well as day to high explosive shell fire.

"An additional difficulty was that, with the right of my line thrust forward, the trenches held just south of the Chemin des Dames by the 2nd Brigade—as well as those held by the French left—were subjected to a very troublesome enfilade fire, both from rifle and artillery, which caused us many casualties. This point in my line was always rather vulnerable and caused some anxiety. The north end of the Paissy ridge could be, and constantly was, swept by artillery fire from three directions—east, north and west. The Tirailleurs (from Morocco) on my right were almost without officers, so that I could not be quite certain of them, and artillery positions from which to reply to the German fire were not easy to find. I therefore regarded this as my most vulnerable point, and for that reason I kept the bulk of the cavalry on the right flank, and also placed my Corps Reserve at Oeuilly and Bourg, when the arrival of the 6th Division enabled me to form one. The Ostel ridge was also always a dangerous point, but there, with the assistance of the guns of the 3rd Division, a cross fire from east and south could be brought to bear upon any hostile infantry advancing to attack.

"In other respects, as soon as there had been time to dig proper trenches, the position was stronger than might have been expected. On the high ground our trenches were on the reverse slopes so that they received some protection from artillery fire—the field for infantry fire was, though comparatively short when judged by text-book standards, very open, and the enemy's infantry soon showed that they had no inclination to face our musketry and shrapnel. In the Chivy and Bray valleys an effective artillery fire could be brought to bear against any attack. However, a reverse

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at either of these points would not have been so serious a matter as on the ridge, and any ground lost could probably have been quickly recovered.

"Although temporarily thrown on to the defensive on this line, we were not prevented from undertaking local offensive action at every opportunity. The fight of the 14th gave our men increased confidence in their officers, in themselves, and in their weapons; and in the fighting which followed, the British soldier soon established a moral superiority over the German."

The 14th of September, 1914, is a date in the history of the Great War more important than any of those who were engaged in the fighting could have anticipated, for from that day we may date the beginning of the long and tragic story of trench warfare, for which no army was prepared, and which no high military authority in any country had foreseen. On the same day also, General von Falkenhayn succeeded General von Moltke as Chief of Staff of the German Army; but in order that the change of command might not discourage the troops the latter, though deprived of his position, was ordered to remain at his post.

Haig was aroused a little after midnight on the morning of September 15th by John Gough, who had just returned from a visit to G.H.Q. He brought the information that French was very anxious with regard to the situation. He feared lest a vigorous offensive by the enemy might drive our troops back into the Aisne.

"There was nothing for it but to hold on to our present position and make it as strong as possible by means of entrenchments.

"I got breakfast about 3 a.m., and motored to the high ground near Vieil-Arcy which overlooks the Aisne valley, so that I could get the first intimation of any attack of the enemy on our positions. We got on to the hill before sun-

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rise, and already a heavy cannonade was going on both of our fronts as well as in the distance on our flanks. There was evidently an attack in progress against the spur on our left, held by the 4th (Guards) Brigade. So we went on to the Canal Bridge just south of Bourg, where the Corps 'reporting centre' was established. Colonel N. Malcolm (General Staff) had spent the night there connected by cable with my H.Q. at Courcelles, and with Divisions. He reported that enemy had thrown large shells every ten minutes into the houses and the vicinity of our bridges near Pont Arcy, but no damage was done. The shells are 8-inch high explosives and make a terrible noise when they explode."

In the course of the day, Haig received a letter from French in which he wrote, "I feel very strongly that the favourable position we are in (on the whole), and the good chance we have of ultimately throwing the enemy back, are due to the splendid advance and stand which has been made by you and the First Army Corps."

On the same day he telegraphed to Lord Kitchener: "Owing chiefly to the fine advance made yesterday by Sir Douglas Haig and the First Corps, we are in a favourable position on our right."

During the month that followed, the British Army passed through their apprenticeship to the trade of trench warfare. The experience was gained under severe disadvantages, as the enemy occupied the higher ground and a larger supply of more effective high explosives. "Our own high explosive", Haig wrote on September 16th, "is of little use as compared with the German, so the enemy's big guns possess a real moral superiority over some of our gunners. In fact, our gunners cannot take on the enemy's heavy batteries. I arranged practice to be carried out with an aeroplane helping to direct the guns today against one

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of the enemy's concealed batteries. . . . The firing was kept up for twenty minutes and seemed effective."

Many of the older officers, who had been slow to appreciate the importance of the air arm, were still reluctant to make full use of the invention, but Haig's mind was never stereotyped, and from the first he had given the greatest encouragement to the pioneers in military aviation, and he was eager to discover fresh ways of utilising their prowess. The effect of their co-operation with the artillery was soon noticeable, for a few days later he writes, "Much use has been made of observers in aeroplanes to locate the enemy's guns and trenches, as well as to direct the fire of our own artillery. The observers, who in this case are also the pilots, in machines fitted with wireless, have been particularly successful, and each day has shown improved results as experience has been gained. These good results are apparent. Our guns now daily attack the German guns with success, while latterly the Germans appear to have failed to locate our guns, and have expended ammunition in searching areas with but little effect."

The relations between the I Corps and their French allies on their right, whom they now had some opportunity of getting to know, were extremely satisfactory. Hearing that the Moroccan troops were short of rations, Haig immediately ordered 10,000 British rations, which were available, to be conveyed to them with his best wishes. The following letter of thanks from General de Maud'huy shows the effect produced by this act of comradeship.

"Maizy. *September 19th.*

Headquarters of the 18th Corps.

"Dear Sir Douglas,

"Nothing could touch me more deeply than your kindness towards my half-starved soldiers, and those 10,000 rations are a gift which I shall always remember.



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"With my warmest thanks and hoping that, one day or another to be useful to you, believe me your very respectful and devoted  
de Maud'huy."

The letter was followed soon after by the gift of a case of champagne, and throughout the war Haig entertained for this particularly gallant and chivalrous French general sentiments of the sincerest respect. He also formed a very favourable impression of Franchet d'Esperey, commanding the Fifth Army, whom he now met for the first time.

Haig's summing up of the situation at the end of September was as follows:

"The hostile artillery fire has become less severe, particularly from the 6-inch howitzers, most of which seem to have disappeared. The most severe fighting has recently fallen to the lot of the French 36th Division, who are now acting in the closest connection with the 1st Division. Our 1st and 2nd Divisions are connected by telephone, and every arrangement has been made to secure mutual support and co-operation. The enemy's trenches in our immediate front have not yet been evacuated, and air reconnaissances report many guns still in position on the ridge. It would, therefore, be unwise to relax any precautions, and our trenches are constantly being improved and strengthened with barbed wire. The enemy's energies have chiefly been confined to long-range shelling of the various roads leading down to the river Aisne from the south. This shelling of roads and bridges has been a constant feature of the German battle. As already stated, a bridge was broken on the 21st, otherwise the enemy has little to show in return for a vast expenditure of ammunition. Some inconvenience is certainly caused, while the shelling is in progress, and all movements of trains, supply columns and ambulances has to take place at night, but this is the most that can be said.

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The closing days of September thus passed in comparative quiet, and on the 1st October both sides were occupying practically the same lines as those which they held on the night of the 14th September. The First Corps has voluntarily given up some ground at the head of the Chivy valley, elsewhere it is very firmly established in trenches which could be held against greatly superior numbers."

If Haig himself had written the history of the war, he would not have closed the account of this phase of the campaign without reminding his readers of the important part that had been played by the cavalry until the initiation of trench warfare. He was well aware of it himself at the time, as is shown by the following entry in his diary:

"I wrote to General Allenby commanding Cavalry Division this evening, to thank him for the very effective support which the First Corps had received from the cavalry. On the 14th when my left flank was uncovered owing to the retirement of the 3rd Division, two cavalry brigades rapidly prolonged my left near Chavonne, and these held the trenches day and night on the left of the 4th (Guards) Brigade in the same part of the field. Also on the flank a brigade was on duty all day. Sometimes the men were put in the trenches to give the infantry a rest. Altogether our cavalry have shown a splendid spirit and have helped us in a way I shall never forget."

## Chapter IX

### YPRES

**B**efore the end of September Sir John French had proposed and General Joffre had agreed that the whole of the British Expeditionary Force should be transferred to the position that had been originally designed for it in the allied line of battle, that is to say, on the extreme left wing. The retreat, the pursuit, the Battle of the Marne, the outflanking movement of the French Sixth Army, had so altered the situation that the British troops now found themselves almost in the centre. It was obviously desirable that they should fight as near to their own base as possible, especially now that important reinforcements were beginning to arrive from England. It was also possible that they might be required to co-operate with naval forces.

The transference of so large a body from one part of the field to another was a difficult operation, and the fact that it was carried out without a hitch reflects credit on all concerned. In order to deceive enemy observers, troops moved only at night, spending the days in their billets. Part of the movement was conducted on foot and part by train. The British Expeditionary Force now consisted of three corps, the III Corps, formed originally out of the 4th Division and the 19th Brigade, having come into being on August 30th under the command of Lieut.-General W. P. Pulteney. These three corps moved at different dates, beginning with the II on the left and ending with the I on the right. It was not until October 16th that Haig heard

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that the last of his troops were south of the Aisne, and, several days before they left, their comrades in the other two corps were already engaged in heavy fighting in their new positions in Flanders.

Haig had to travel nearly two hundred miles that day, and it was not until evening that he reached St. Omer where G.H.Q. were now situated.

"I saw Sir John French on my arrival. He seemed quite satisfied with the general situation and said that the enemy was falling back, and that we 'would soon be in a position to round them up'. His intention is not to employ the First Corps until it has quite concentrated, and units have had a day or two to pull themselves together after their trying time in the trenches.

"We (Gough, Baird and I) billet with a Monsieur Aubert who has a comfortable house looking on to a grass square on one side of the old ruined Abbey of St. Bertin. He gave us dinner and dined with us. All his men servants have gone to the war; only his cook (a woman) is left. He was most kind and hospitable—a widower and apparently does nothing, age 53. When there is no war he does a little shooting. I think the inhabitants of this part of the country are more pleased at having us in their country than those on the Aisne. Possibly the deeds of the Germans in Belgium are better known to them."

The respite which the Commander-in-Chief designed to give the I Corps was destined to be a short one, and to be followed by no easy rounding up of the enemy, as the now incurable optimism of G.H.Q. supposed.

The Corps marched early the next morning—too early, Haig thought, as there was no military object to be served, and a longer rest would have been appreciated. He himself lunched on the road to Poperinghe, where they met a party of refugees. "A well-dressed woman and a man came up

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and asked if they could go by Tournai to Brussels! It was impossible of course. I told them to go to St. Omer and asked them where they had come from. They said Ostend, but originally from Brussels and Charleroi. They had walked all the way from Ostend with a basket on the arm or a pack of clothes on the back. I thought the woman seemed to bear up much better than the men of the party. I gave them two dozen Oxo soup squares for which they seemed most grateful."

At Poperinghe Haig met Sir Henry Rawlinson, who had recently taken command of the newly formed IV Corps. He "seemed most cheery and anxious to get on . . . his bright joviality is of great value to an army when on active service and things are not going too well."

We have already seen how the original German design was to outflank the Allies in the west, how the tables had been turned on them, and how the outflankers had been themselves outflanked at the Battle of the Marne. The final stage of this desperate competition on the part of the two armies to outflank one another resulted in a hurried extension of both battle lines in a westerly direction. This has been described as the Race to the Sea.

While Haig was still on the Aisne, French had already embarked on the attempt to turn the Germans' right flank at La Bassée—the II Corps to whom this duty was assigned was now on the right of the British Army. The III Corps was on its left and then came the 7th Division, forming part of the IV Corps. The I Corps was ordered to take up a position on the extreme left.

On October 19th, "I motored to St. Omer and saw Sir John French at 9.30 a.m. He told me that Smith-Dorrien's Second Corps (3rd Division) had *not* taken La Bassée. He might have to support that Corps to prevent a gap arising between it and Third Corps (which is moving down the

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Lys). He did not wish to do this, and meantime ordered 19th Brigade to move in that direction in motors, as Army Reserve under his own hand. He wished to send me towards Bruges, to operate either towards the sea (if the enemy now opposing the Belgians remained), or towards Ghent. I was to return at 6 p.m., when he would give me definite orders after he knew the result of today's action.

"... I returned to St. Omer at 6 p.m. Sir John stated that he 'estimated the enemy's strength on the front Ostend and Menin at about one corps, not more'. I was ordered to march via Thourout and capture Bruges. 'Defeat enemy and drive him on Ghent.' My right 'would pass through Ypres'. After passing that place, I was free to decide whether to go for enemy on the north of me, or that part of him which was towards Courtrai. When I did advance, the French cavalry would be on my left and Byng's cavalry division on my right.

"On my return to Headquarters, I heard from Rawlinson that Byng had been heavily attacked and 'had lost heavily'. So in sending Rawlinson a copy of my orders, I wrote him a note, saying 'that if Capper (7th Division) was attacked in superior numbers tomorrow morning, he should leave a rear guard to delay the enemy, and make him show his strength, while the bulk of his force withdrew to a position in which I could support him'.

"I asked number of casualties, and wrote that the results of failure in this war would be so terrible for England, that we must all be prepared to submit to severe losses; that if we attacked enemy *with determination* we were sure to win. He replied that Byng's casualties were only fifty, and that he had ordered him to hold his position. This reached me about 2 a.m.

"Today's *Times* reached me at Cassel by 5 p.m."

The meaning of the instructions given to the I Corps

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was simply this. The outflanking movement which had been attempted at La Bassée had failed. The German right was still intact, and the enemy had won another heat in the race to the sea. Only a few miles now separated the extended wings of both armies from that impenetrable barrier. It was the last lap. Upon the I Corps fell the duty of making the final effort which alone could render an early victory possible. The situation was equally obvious to the German strategists. They also knew that the supreme moment had arrived, and therefore in the fighting that followed a phenomenon appeared which was rare in the history of this war. In most of the great battles one side was attempting to break the line and the other side to maintain it. Alternately the Allies and the Germans assumed the offensive or the defensive. But on this occasion both sides, spurred on by the hope of a swift decision, advanced simultaneously to the attack.

Battle had been joined on October 19th by the right wing and centre of the British Army, but it was not until October 20th that the I Corps came into the fray. On their right was the 3rd Cavalry Division under Byng and then the 7th Division under Capper, both forming part of the IV Corps. On their left was the French II Cavalry Corps under General de Mitry. During this day the advance met with little opposition. Haig was at Ypres during the greater part of it, watching events and discussing the course of the battle with other generals.

"After lunch I rode out to St. Julien and saw Generals Kavanagh and Byng. Byng had only some 50 casualties in his whole division yesterday. A small number considering the nature of this war, and all that is at stake. He spoke of having to fall back, and General Capper expressed a fear that his left might be turned as some of Byng's squadrons had fallen back slightly, so I sent two battalions of the 4th

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(Guards) Brigade to prolong Capper's left, and take over the right of Byng's line.

"I returned to Poperinghe about 7 p.m., and stayed the night there. The advance of the First Corps passed without incident, and the head of the 2nd Division reached the cross roads  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles north-west of Zonnebeke.

"Sir H. Rawlinson came to see me about 10 p.m., and arranged to cover my right flank during our advance to-morrow. My objective is to advance via Thourout and capture Bruges! But considerable opposition must be overcome before I can reach Thourout."

The next morning Haig left Poperinghe at 5.30. The plan was that his two Divisions should make the capture of the villages of Poelcappelle and Passchendaele their first objective, and that they should then proceed to the capture of Schaapbaillie and Westroosbeke. The advance was considerably delayed owing to blocks of troops on the road, and soon encountered determined resistance from the enemy, who "seem to have been advancing when our attack took place". Fair progress was made, however, and Haig considered that "all indications pointed to a successful advance, when, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, without any warning whatsoever the French Cavalry Corps on our left received orders to retire west of the canal. The reason for this withdrawal was stated to be that the enemy was advancing in strength of about a Division from the direction of Clercken. The G.O.C. of the French Cavalry Division on the immediate left of our 1st Division declined absolutely to obey this order until it was repeated. He refused to uncover our flank without 'une ordre formelle'. It was certainly a strange proceeding to withdraw troops supporting an ally's flank during a battle. Lomax detached a few companies to protect his own flank, and these were never attacked in force throughout the afternoon.



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"Almost at the same time as I received this report, Sir H. Rawlinson came to see me at the Hôtel Châtelaine, where I had my headquarters, and reported that hostile infantry and guns in considerable strength were advancing from Comines up both sides of the canal towards Ypres, and had already forced back Gough's Cavalry Division (2nd) in that part. The only reserve at his disposal was one of Byng's Cavalry Brigades near Zonnebeke. He had now moved it to support his right near Zandvoorde. Then Rawlinson's 22nd Brigade on his left near Zonnebeke was attacked, the men left their trenches and the front was pressed back.

"In view of all this uncertainty, excitement and despairing messages, I decided that it was impossible to continue the offensive as ordered with the First Corps, so I ordered 1st and 2nd Divisions not to go beyond the first stage of attack, viz., the capture of Poelcappelle and Passchendaele. They were to fortify these points and send forward active reconnaissances.

"... Sir John French came to see me in the afternoon at the hotel in Ypres. He explained that he would soon be taking the offensive and approved of the position I had taken up. The advance was to be discontinued for the present.

"General de Mitry, commanding the French Cavalry Corps on my left, came to see me. He really wished to *explain* the retirement today of his cavalry which uncovered my left flank. Sir John saw him, deprecated the presence of the French Territorials on the roads ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  divisions between Ypres and my firing line!) when he wished the British Army to advance, and asked him to explain to General Bidon that he *must* move them northwards out of the way or he (Sir J.) would withdraw 'l'armée anglaise to the west of the canal'. Sir John's French was not fluent, but the French Generals kept their countenances wonderfully and

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seemed much upset because Sir John was upset. Sir John was very angry with the French. De Mitry, a cavalry man of the old school, spoke disparagingly before General le Roy, who commanded a Territorial Division. 'No discipline, could not march and without officers who knew their work', etc., etc. This nearly led to a disturbance between the two Frenchmen."

This was the first of many days' hard fighting, of which a vivid picture is contained in the diary. On October 22nd Haig issued orders "for the Corps to content itself with strengthening its position on the line which it held, and to prepare for the attacks which there could be little doubt would be made upon us". The reason for this decision was that "from yesterday's operations I had come to the conclusion that the enemy was in considerably greater strength than had originally been anticipated by Sir John French when he gave me my instructions at St. Omer. Further, it seemed certain now that enemy's action was going to take the form of a determined offensive and not, as had been anticipated, that of a rearguard action. Reports which now reached me from three sources indicated that the enemy was advancing from the south-east and was preparing to make a considerable effort to reach Ypres."

In the accounts which Haig gives of the fierce days of bitter warfare that followed, accounts which were written either at the time or immediately afterwards, it is noticeable that he never fails to pay tribute to the gallantry of the foe, that there is not a line to suggest that he is infected by the then fashionable spirit of hatred, nor does he ever employ, when writing of the Germans, the opprobrious terms "Hun" and "Boche" which were in almost universal use among the Allies.

Describing the recovery of some trenches lost to the enemy on October 23rd, he writes, "The attack was very

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strongly opposed and the bayonet had to be used. The Germans resisted until the very end and gave way only when machine guns were enfilading their trenches at very close range, and when they were threatened by cold steel."

On the 24th, "A counter-attack was made by the enemy on the Queen's during the evening, and forced them back into the line of supports. Farther on the right near Langemarck the 5th Brigade was attacked about 9 p.m. The enemy came on five times in 'columns of fours'. The Oxford and Bucks waited to fire until the enemy arrived within fifty yards, and then simply mowed them down. The enemy's losses were enormous."

On the 25th, "Captain Rising related to General Landon in the evening the experiences of his men in the afternoon. The Germans, quite young fellows, came on with great gallantry. One mounted officer kept encouraging his men to go forward, until within four hundred yards of our firing line, when he was killed.

"Landon tells us that Langemarck was shelled yesterday by the enemy with his big 'Black Marias'. The craters made were as large as any on the Aisne. The bombardment was terrific with the result that the town does not exist."

On the 26th a determined advance by the 2nd Division was at first successful, but the failure of the 7th Division on their right held up further developments, and on the following day the 7th Division was placed under Haig's command, Rawlinson returning temporarily to England to train the 8th Division.

During the whole of this week there had been no respite, for the fighting had been practically continuous, and such short intervals as occurred were occupied in digging and preparing to resist the next attack. On the 28th information was received that a great attack was to take place on the morrow at 5.30 a.m.

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"The attack of which information had been received on the 28th instant began punctually at 5.30 a.m. on the 29th. The enemy advanced in very dense formation, and supported by very heavy artillery fire. The principal point of the attack was the cross roads one mile east of Gheluvelt, and by 8 o'clock the enemy had succeeded in driving back our line to about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west of the line Gheluvelt-Poezelhoek. A Battalion of the 3rd Brigade (Landon) was accordingly sent forward in support towards Gheluvelt, which was followed shortly afterwards by the three remaining Battalions of the Brigade moving on both sides of the road, and the Corps Reserve (2nd Brigade) under Bulfin was moved up to the Menin road near Veldhoek. At noon reports were received that the enemy was massing in considerable strength in the Château of Poezelhoek, and accordingly the 2nd Division (Monro) was directed to counter-attack, using its reserve, and moving from the south-west corner of the wood due west of Routel.

"Shortly before 1 p.m. orders were also given for the 2nd Brigade in Corps Reserve to counter-attack with two Battalions on the left of the 3rd Brigade to the north-east of Gheluvelt, and a corresponding advance was made by the 7th Division south of the Menin road. These three attacks were pressed forward with great energy and determination. At 1.45 p.m. the enemy began to give way, and by dark the Kruiseik Hill had been recaptured and the 1st Brigade had re-established most of its line north of the Menin road. The cross roads one mile north of Gheluvelt, however, remained in the enemy's possession.

"During the day, Major-General Gough, commanding the 2nd Cavalry Division, hearing of the concentration of hostile forces in our front, had, on his own initiative, sent five squadrons, a section of guns, and an Infantry Battalion to act as Corps Reserve at Klein Zillebeke. Circumstances,

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however, did not require any call being made on these troops.

"The enemy seems to have pierced the line south of the cross roads  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles S.E. of Gheluvelt in the grey of the morning, and then to have worked north, thus getting behind the trenches of the right of the First Corps. In this way, a Battalion of the Coldstream Guards was cut off and only some forty remain.

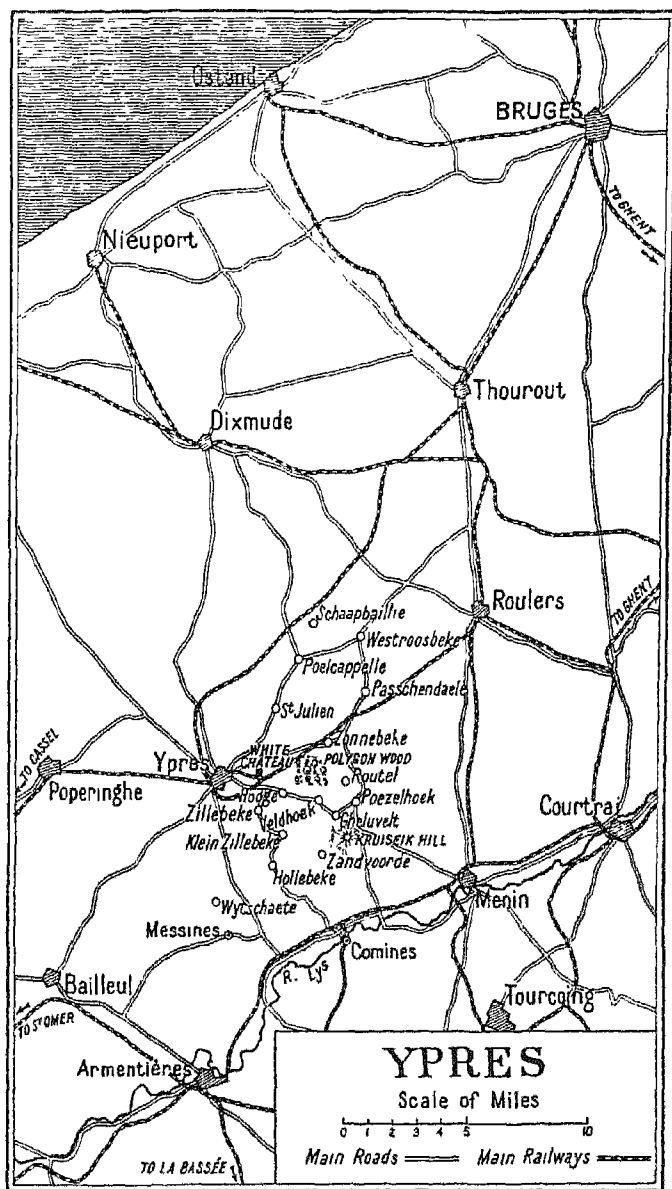
"I moved the Reporting Centre back to White Château near level crossing on Menin road (which was known as Hell-Fire Corner), to enable Lomax to make himself comfortable in Hooge Château. I found him living with his Divisional Staff in a small cottage of two rooms, so sent him into Hooge Château."

That evening he received a telegram from French. "I have never for a moment doubted the First Corps. I wish I could have been beside you today. You will win as you always have. I am sending London Scottish to Ypres, as they may be some help, and I know you must be hard pressed. If not absolutely required, I know you will not use them."

The mood of the German High Command at this moment may be judged from the terms of the following Order of the Day:

"The break-through" (which was to take place on the following day) "will be of decisive importance. We must and therefore will conquer, settle for ever the centuries-long struggle, end the War and strike the decisive blow against our most detested enemy. We will finish with the British, Indians, Canadians, Moroccans and other trash, feeble adversaries who surrender in mass if they are attacked with vigour."

The next morning, October 30th, the enemy opened fire at 7 a.m. with two hundred and sixty heavy guns, the





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object of their attack being the village of Zandvoorde, which was defended by the 7th Cavalry Brigade. After a heroic resistance, the Brigade in order to escape annihilation was compelled to retire. The capture of this position exposed the right of the 7th Division, who counter-attacked without success.

"The position at this period was serious. . . . It was now evident that the Germans were in great force, and accordingly orders were issued at 12.30 p.m. for the line Gheluvelt to the corner of the canal to be held at all costs." The most alarming feature of the situation was the danger of the Germans breaking through south of Ypres, and thus cutting off the communication of all the Allied troops to the northward. Haig accordingly sent messages to the Commander-in-Chief and also to the French General on his left, General Dubois, calling their attention to this possibility. Dubois replied by immediately placing three Battalions and a Cavalry Brigade at his disposal.

As the result of the afternoon's fighting, Haig was able to write, "The situation at nightfall had to a certain extent been restored, but was still full of anxiety for the following day. Orders were accordingly issued for every effort to be made, *first* to secure the line then held, and *secondly*, when this line was thoroughly secure, to resume the offensive.

"I dined in Ypres, but returned to White Château near the level crossing to sleep, in order to be closer to the troops."

Haig's anxiety with regard to the immediate future was to be amply justified by the events of the following day, October 31st. It had been a moonlight night, and the morning proved fine, the early autumn mist rapidly dispersing in the sunshine. Haig's first caller was the French General Moussy, who was commanding the troops that General Dubois had sent to support the British on the previous day. He came for orders and Haig requested him to attack in a



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south-easterly direction and recapture Hollebeke Château. Accordingly, "two Battalions of the 68th Regiment advanced about 6.45 a.m. They were heavily shelled on emerging from the woods, one lost the Battalion Commander, and the other was taken in flank from across the canal. This Battalion turned south and entrenched. At the same time the 90th Regiment, held in reserve in Zillebeke, was heavily shelled and was forced to move west of the village. The French attack thus came to a complete standstill and made no further progress during the day."

At 7 o'clock, General d'Urbal, commanding all the French forces in the north, appeared at Headquarters. Haig describes him as "a big, smart-looking, polite man". Together they agreed upon the measures that they would adopt if a retreat became necessary.

"Reports varied as to the strength of the enemy's forces now attacking my Corps. Early in the morning, however, a prisoner who had been captured during the night, proved to be of the XV German Army Corps, and on his examination he stated that the whole of the XV Army Corps was present. This information was at once telegraphed to G.H.Q. and telephoned to General Foch."

Meanwhile the 1st Division had been heavily engaged since dawn. Hopelessly outnumbered by the enemy, they had been fighting with desperate tenacity. As an example of their depleted strength, it may be recorded that when the 1st Battalion of the Scots Guards captured fifty-eight Bavarians they could not spare the men to act as an escort to the prisoners. But all the time the bombardment of the British trenches was increasing in violence and accuracy. By 9.30 a.m. the Welsh Regiment, says the Official Historian, had been literally "blown out of their trenches". At 10 a.m. the report reached Haig's headquarters that the "situation in the trenches south and south-east of Gheluvelt

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was serious". This statement certainly did not err on the side of exaggeration. It was indeed difficult for those behind the line to learn how the battle was progressing. Such telephonic communication as had existed had long broken down. Every runner who left the trenches was killed before his message could be delivered. It has been reckoned that the British were outnumbered by six to one, and the proportion of German superiority in artillery was far greater. The enemy's accounts of the fighting are those which reflect the greatest credit upon their opponents. They tell of the "maze of obstacles that were encountered and of the fresh troops continually being hurled into the fray". There were, in fact, no obstacles save the trenches, and such defences as had been hastily designed and strengthened in the few hours that had been available. Nor were there any fresh troops engaged on the British side that day. The men who defended the village of Gheluvelt were all that remained of that 1st Division who in the last six weeks had spent nearly a fortnight in continual retreat, nearly another fortnight in continual advance, who had lain a month in the trenches under ceaseless fire, who had been hastily transferred from one scene of warfare to another, only to be plunged immediately into fiercer fighting; they had fought actions which in other ages would have marked epochs, and they had taken them with a grumble and a smile as a part of their daily work; these were the remnant of that mercenary army, termed by their enemies contemptible, men whose names should be enshrined for ever in the hearts of Englishmen, saints and martyrs of their race.

All that morning reports, sometimes confused, often contradictory, reached the Commander of the I Corps at the White Château. Soon after midday he learnt that Gheluvelt had been lost and later rumours were still more

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alarming. Determining to see for himself, he set out down the Menin road towards Hooze—"his appearance, moving up the road at a slow trot with part of his staff behind him as at an inspection, doing much to restore confidence".<sup>1</sup> But the evidence that met his eyes was terribly convincing, and the information that he received on returning to his headquarters confirmed his worst fears. While he had been riding towards Hooze from the west, General Lomax had reached it from the east, and there he had greeted his brother Divisional Commander, Monro, with the laconic announcement, "My line is broken." This was the intelligence which Haig received on his return to Headquarters. But worse was to follow.

It will be remembered that Haig had moved his Reporting Centre back to the White Château in order that Lomax might "make himself comfortable in Hooze Château". It was in Hooze Château, therefore, that Lomax and Monro, together with their highest Staff Officers, were now engaged in earnest council of war. When a low-flying enemy aeroplane flew over the Château, they did not heed it, when a shell fell in the Château garden they continued their work. The next shell fell on the entrance to the council chamber itself. Six Staff Officers were killed in an instant, Monro, the Commander of the 2nd Division, was stunned, and Lomax the calm, resourceful, utterly reliable Commander of the heroic 1st Division, received his death wound. The news of this tragedy reached Haig about 2 p.m., and once more he prepared to visit the front line himself in order to form his own opinion and possibly to take command himself of the 1st Division.

At that moment Sir John French arrived. Such was the congestion of traffic on the road that he had been obliged to walk part of the way. When he was informed of the des-

<sup>1</sup> Official History—Vol. II, page 325.

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perate condition of affairs, he "was full of sympathy and expressed his gratitude for what the Corps, as well as I myself had done since we landed in France. No one could have been nicer at such a time of crisis. But he had no reinforcements to send me, and viewed the situation with the utmost gravity."

There seems to have been something almost valedictory in the words which the Commander-in-Chief addressed to his Corps Commander before he sadly turned to retrace his steps towards his car. Once again Haig mounted his horse, and the thought can hardly have been absent from his mind that he might be doing so for the last time. Nor would he have greatly cared to live if the British Army had been defeated and the war lost. But in the very gateway of the Château he encountered General Rice, galloping, breathless. "Gheluvelt has been recaptured! The 1st Division has rallied."

This is not the place to tell again the hardly credible story of how the fortunes of the day had been restored, how one Battalion of the Worcestershire together with any stragglers, batmen or cooks who could be hastily collected, under the guidance and inspiration of General C. Fitzclarence, under the leadership of Major E. B. Hankey, advanced over ground that meant certain death for the majority, and charged into the blazing village of Gheluvelt, so that the astonished enemy turned and fled.

Haig heard the good news as calmly as he had heard the bad. He despatched an aide-de-camp to catch the Commander-in-Chief if possible before he reached his car, and himself "rode forward to be in closer touch with the situation, and see if I could do anything to organise stragglers and push them forward to help in checking the enemy. I rode to Veldhoek and saw Generals Landon, Capper and Fitzclarence, and found that Rice's report was true"—it

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was not unnatural that he should have doubted it—"Gheluvelt has been retaken by the Worcesters and the situation has been restored. The opinion on all sides is that the troops are very exhausted. The two Brigadiers—Landon and Fitzclarence—assure me that if the enemy makes a push at any point, they doubt our men being able to hold on. Fighting by day and digging by night to strengthen their trenches has thoroughly tired them out."

But the enemy made no push and our men did hold on.

"The recapture of Gheluvelt released the Sixth Cavalry Brigade, till then held in support of the 1st Division; two regiments of this Brigade were sent at once to clear the woods to the south-east, and closed the gap by my instructions in the line between the 7th Division and 2nd Brigade. I saw some of the squadrons go forward. They advanced with much dash, partly mounted and partly dismounted. Their appearance seems to have taken the enemy by surprise in the woods, and they succeeded in killing large numbers of the enemy. This advance of the Cavalry materially helped to restore the line. About 5 p.m. the French Cavalry Brigade also came up to the cross roads just east of Hooge, and at once sent forward a dismounted detachment to support our 7th Cavalry Brigade. I watched the smart dapper little fellows march off. Several had 'jemima boots', most unsuited for war and mud such as we soon encountered in Flanders. They went off in great spirits to take on the German Infantry, though the little carbine with which they were armed was not much better than an ordinary rook rifle."

Such attention to detail even in the heat of battle was in the true Napoleonic tradition.

"On leaving the troops near Veldhoek, I ride by Zillebeke and see General Moussy. It was nearly dark when I

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reached his headquarters. The little town had been terribly bombarded and most houses greatly destroyed."

He went back to Ypres for dinner and returned to the White Château to sleep. But the long day was not yet over, for Captain Requin arrived at 11 p.m. from General Foch. Haig knew Requin well, as he had been attached to his command at Aldershot for three months. Together they discussed the plans for the morrow, and when Requin left General Vidal arrived. He had been placed in command of a detachment of six Battalions and three groups of Artillery, and had come to arrange with Haig how he could best be of service.

That night the line as held in the morning had practically been reoccupied. The day had been one of glory for the British Army, and particularly for the 1st Division, but even now "it was a question whether the line of battered and ever diminishing British Battalions and Squadrons, patched in places by French reinforcements, could continue to hold on. In hastily dug trenches, they had to stand punishment from over two hundred German heavy guns; and at the same time without any obstacles to cover them—except on the 2nd Division front—to keep back the ever increasing weight of the German Infantry. With Infantry Brigades reduced below the establishment of Battalions, and Cavalry Regiments below that of Squadrons, with only some thirty medium heavy guns—some of which were obsolete—and with the imminent danger of lack of gun ammunitions, the future looked gloomy and doubtful."<sup>1</sup>

At 8 o'clock on the morning of November 1st, General Landon, who had succeeded Lomax in command of the 1st Division, came to report that the Division was so reduced in numbers and disorganised that no attack in force

<sup>1</sup> Official History—Vol. II, page 345.

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could be withstood. Rifles were jammed owing to mud and dirt, and there had been no opportunity of cleaning and oiling them.

In view of these conditions, it was fortunate that on this day the brunt of the attack was borne by the Cavalry Corps who were obliged to abandon Messines and Wytschaete together with the important ridge that connected them. On the extreme left of the I Corps the Irish Guards were subjected to a heavy bombardment and suffered severe casualties. General Bulfin was seriously wounded, "a great loss to me," wrote Haig, "as he was a great tower of strength at all times".

The next morning the White Château itself was heavily shelled. Three men were killed and a large chandelier in Haig's office crashed on to the table. He accordingly moved his Headquarters and slept that night at Ypres in "a fine old house with some good old furniture in it. Its present owner went to England last week, but his housekeeper and cook, two old people, looked after us with great care, and I was sorry to see the place so upset. They gave us dinner, and some good claret in spite of the shelling." A direct hit was scored on this house the next day, and Haig's Reporting Centre was hit the day after, when Colonel Marker, his Quartermaster General, was mortally wounded. "Enemy had evidently some spies about to help him to direct his fire so accurately, this being the third time my Headquarters have been shelled in the last few days."

On November 5th, Haig motored to Bailleul to see Sir John French and lunched with him.

"The table was laid in a room at the back of a chemist's shop. The Corps Commanders were present at the meeting, viz. Smith-Dorrien, Pulteney, Sir James Willcocks and Allenby. The Second Corps (Smith-Dorrien) is to relieve my First Corps as soon as possible, so that my Divisions

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may have a rest in which to refit. I was very astonished to find that the point which attracted most interest was, 'Winter leave' for the Army! Personally, my one thought was how soon I could get my battle-worn troops relieved and given a few days' rest out of the trenches and shell fire!"

The days that followed were always anxious and often critical. Hardly for a moment did the pressure from the enemy cease or slacken. Almost nightly Haig had to be roused in the middle of his short sleep to be presented with some urgent and disturbing intelligence. His officers marvelled at the manner in which he would immediately recover consciousness and the complete possession of all his faculties, would appreciate instantly the new situation, give his instructions and fall asleep again almost before they had left the room. Serenity and the command of sleep, gifts that great soldiers have seldom lacked, were never more needed than during this period of the war. The only encouraging feature of the situation was furnished by reports from prisoners, which showed the condition of the enemy to be little better than our own. Some of them stated that certain units had received no food for three days, and on November 8th an officer was captured who "stated that their orders were to attack somewhere every day", that they had very few officers left, and that by acting in this way they would soon have none at all. "A village school-master was also taken, gallantly leading his men against us; some of the prisoners are quite young and have only fired forty rounds before taking the field."

That night Haig rode through Ypres. "The house I lived in there and several others in the Vanderpenbon Plaz are a mass of cinders. All the nice old furniture and glass chandeliers burnt. I infer from the bombardment of Ypres last night that the Kaiser has given up the idea of a triumphal entry."



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The Germans, however, were determined to make one more terrific effort to win their way through Ypres to the Channel ports. At 3 a.m. on November 11th, Haig was roused by an urgent message from General d'Urbal asking for the return of two battalions of Zouaves who had been placed under his command.

"The night had been a quiet one, but at 9.30 a.m. a heavy attack, preceded by extremely heavy shelling by a large number of guns along the whole front of the First and Second Divisions, suddenly developed. The line which we held was pierced just north of the Menin road and consequently the Royal Fusiliers, whose trenches were immediately south of the road, were enfiladed and this Regiment lost very heavily. Its Colonel, McMahon, was killed, and the strength of the regiment was reduced to two subalterns and about one hundred men."

A counter-attack by the Royal Scots Fusiliers was launched, which after very heavy casualties succeeded in re-establishing the line. It had, however, been broken in another place, south of Polygon Wood, and towards noon Lord Cavan, who was commanding on the right wing of the I Corps, reported that the French, who were on his right, were giving way under heavy shell fire. "The situation, therefore, at this point was extremely critical, most of the Divisional and Corps Reserves had been used up to re-establish the position in the vicinity of the Menin road. . . . By this time it had been ascertained from prisoners of war that we were opposed by regiments of the Prussian Guard, an entirely new body of troops which had been able to concentrate in this area without any information of the movement being received by G.Q.G. of the Allied Forces."

Once again fresh troops, the flower of the Prussian Army, were being hurled against this poor remnant of an army, in which Companies represented Battalions and

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whose weary veterans had been fighting constantly for two months and a half. "About 2 p.m. reports came in reporting a critical situation north of Menin road, owing to gap in 1st Brigade line. All Divisional and Corps Reserves are moved to block it and drive back a force of 1200 Germans who are advancing on it. I send Gough to see Landon and find out what General Fitzclarence has been doing."

Haig was to learn all too soon what Fitzclarence had been doing. Before the messenger could reach him, he had organised a counter-attack which had driven the Germans at the point of the bayonet out of the wood that they had recently captured. At nightfall his whole Brigade was reduced to four officers and about three hundred men, but he was still determined to recover his lost trenches, and when the Commander of the 1st Division put two additional Battalions under his command—some five hundred men in all—he arranged for another attack to take place in the early hours of the morning. While going forward himself to reconnoitre, he was mortally wounded by a rifle bullet. The I Corps and the whole Army suffered a loss that they could ill afford.

On November 12th, the situation seemed from the point of view of the English to be still extremely critical, but the Germans failed to take advantage of it. Haig was aroused at 5 a.m. "by very heavy rifle fire about two miles off" where apparently the Germans were attacking the French, but without much result. He spent the day visiting his Divisional and Brigade Commanders and expecting an attack which never materialised. He recorded it in the evening as "on the whole a quiet day after a very anxious morning".

Haig issued the following message to the troops on November 12th:

"The Commander-in-Chief has asked me to convey to

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the troops under my command his congratulations and thanks for their splendid resistance to the German attack yesterday.

"This attack was delivered by some 12 fresh Battalions of the German Guard Corps which had been specially brought up to carry out the task in which so many other Corps had failed: viz., to crush the British and force a way through to Ypres.

"Since its arrival in this neighbourhood the First Corps assisted by the 3rd Cav. Div., 7th Div. and troops from the Second Corps has met and defeated the 23rd, 26th and 27th German Reserve Corps, the 15th Active Cps., and finally a strong force from the Guards Cps. It is doubtful if the annals of the British Army contain any finer record than this."

Although it was difficult for the men themselves to realise it, they had in effect on November 11th won the long first battle of Ypres. When the storm has spent its fury, the sea does not instantly become calm, and for many days fighting continued, which at times seemed almost as violent as that which had preceded it. There was an attack on the 14th which accomplished nothing, and on the 17th the whole line was heavily shelled, and one sector was attacked, which considerably hindered the relief of the 2nd Division. For at last it had been found possible to give the battered skeleton of the I Corps a rest. The reliefs which began on the 17th were completed on the 21st, and on the 22nd Haig crossed to England for five days' leave. His wife met him at Victoria. He wrote in his diary, "It seemed as if a hundred years had passed since I parted with Doris at Aldershot."

During the three months that her husband had been away, Lady Haig had been working in the Empress Eugénie's hospital at Farnborough. The old Empress, a

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romantic link with the last great European war, was not so optimistic as she had been in 1870. It seemed doubtful to her whether Republican France could succeed where Imperial France had failed.

All his life Haig had been accustomed to rely upon one woman. After his mother it had been his sister, and now it was his wife. Not only did he write to her at every available opportunity letters breathing deep affection, but he also sent to her the pages of his diary as he wrote them, for her to copy and preserve. He was running a certain risk in doing so, for had these documents fallen into wrong hands or had their contents ever been disclosed, he would have rendered himself liable to severe criticism. But his faith in his wife was absolute, and it was never betrayed.

These letters disclose a side of his character that few people ever saw, and that many suspected did not exist. They are full of tenderness for his wife, of compassion for his men and of longing for the war to be over and the family to be reunited. When his Corps is transferred to Flanders from the Aisne, he is happy to "feel that I am much nearer to you". He has no time for his own affairs and leaves them all in her hands.

"I congratulate you", he writes, "on the splendid way you are looking after my finances—our finances, I ought to say, for all that I have is yours. I feel I don't do half enough to make you happy and comfortable." On November 4th he writes, "I pray daily for courage, tranquillity and self-control." Already the war had brought tragedy into his family circle, for Lady Haig's recently married sister had lost her husband, Lord Worsley, and Haig's letters are full of expressions of his deep sympathy with his young sister-in-law.

The five days of this first period of leave were spent very quietly at his sister's house in Prince's Gate. Younger men

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coming home would naturally plunge into gaiety, but all that Haig wanted was peace. Every evening was spent at home, and the only events of the day were important interviews. On the first morning he spent two hours with Kitchener "discussing the war situation generally and particularly the equipment and armament of the Force in France. . . . It was past one o'clock before I left Lord K. and then I found Doris waiting patiently for me in the hall. We walked most of the way back to Prince's Gate and lunched there. . . . At 4.30 we were received by Queen Alexandra at Marlborough House, and I was presented with a quantity of woollen comforts, both for my own use as well as for others on my staff."

On the following day he was received by the King, who was "most complimentary"; and his two little girls arrived from Wales, where they were living with their aunt. On November 25th he saw the Prime Minister in the morning, who was also "most complimentary regarding the work of the First Corps and myself". They had luncheon with the Empress Eugénie. "The old lady was very pleased to see me, but it was clear that she did not feel any confidence in the French winning. I thought she seemed very fond of Doris. After lunch we inspected the hospital, which is under Doris's charge. There was only one officer in bed and two walking about. About five nurses were present. The whole arrangements seemed to me to be most beautifully organised and all the patients were so comfortable. It seemed strange that so few patients were sent there."

The last morning of his leave was spent at the War Office with the Adjutant General, Sclater, and Lord Kitchener. He impressed on the former the lack of officers, and said, "Send out young Oxford and Cambridge men as officers; they understand the crisis in which the British Empire is

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involved." The last afternoon was spent with the children at the Zoo. "The houses were locked up before we came away, so that they did not see the monkey house, a great disappointment to both Xandra and Doria, but they saw every other kind of animal very well and fed them."

The next morning he returned to France.

Nothing of importance had occurred at the Front during his absence on leave, and the remainder of the year was to prove uneventful. The I Corps was in reserve and Corps Headquarters were at Hazebrouck, where they remained until just before Christmas. Early in December the King paid his first visit to the Army, and Haig sat between His Majesty and the Prince of Wales at dinner at G.H.Q. They discussed the award of Victoria Crosses, and Haig pointed out that the carrying of a wounded man out of action, a deed which tradition associates with the Victoria Cross, is very often a mistake, as a careless movement may do a wounded man much harm, and it is wrong to increase unnecessarily the loss of valuable lives.

Towards the end of the year it was decided to form the whole of the Expeditionary Force into two armies, and to give Haig, who had already been promoted to the rank of full General, the command of the First Army. This was to consist of the I Corps, the IV Corps and the Indian Corps. Haig handed over the command of the I Corps to Monro, who had commanded the 2nd Division since the opening of the campaign. The new organisation came into force on December 25th. A few days earlier the I Corps had relieved the Indian Corps in the front line, and Haig had moved his headquarters from Hazebrouck to Hinges, where he spent Christmas.

During the month he had welcomed the arrival in France from India of his own regiment, the 17th Lancers. Alan Fletcher, his former companion on the polo field, became

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his A.D.C., and remained with him to the end of the war. On Christmas Eve, "Alan Fletcher, Straker (the other A.D.C.) and Secrett (his servant) helped me to tie up and address my Christmas parcels. Doris sent me a nice present for everyone of my staff, some thirty-six in all, including the servants. And Leo Rothschild sent me fifty odd pairs of fur-lined gloves. All were sent out with a line from me, 'Best wishes for Xmas from Lady Haig' or 'from Mr. Leo Rothschild' as the case might be. This kept me employed till past midnight. But what an amount of pleasure it gave me to distribute Doris's Xmas gifts in the midst of all my anxiety."

## Chapter X

### NEUVE CHAPELLE

With the opening of the year 1915 the melancholy conviction began to force itself upon the minds of those who were responsible for the conduct of the war that the hope of an early decision on the Western Front no longer existed. Simultaneously there arose among the military and civil authorities on either side two conflicting schools of military strategy. On the one hand there were those who, with whatever forebodings, gravely accepted the grim prospect of a long struggle in the main arena, entailing slaughter and sacrifice beyond anything previously contemplated, and only terminating when one of the protagonists was reduced to accepting whatever terms were dictated.

There were, on the other hand, some who refused to admit to their minds so fearful a conclusion. Wars had not been so mercilessly fought out in the past, why should the present one prove an exception? Genius could find out a way, closed to the purblind vision of military experts, which would take the professional strategists by surprise and prove a sure and easy road to victory. For the next four years these rival schools of thought strove with one another for predominance in the councils of war. The majority of the trained soldiers leaned towards the former theory, but a large number of the more active-minded politicians adopted the latter. They knew enough of the subject to be aware



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that the main principle in strategy is to turn the opponent's flank. Assuming that this was no longer possible on that line that was held from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier, they argued that it was necessary to go beyond these limits, and by winning a decisive victory in the east render the position of the Central Powers in the west no longer tenable. Lord Fisher had thought it possible to turn the enemy's flank in the west by attacking in the Baltic with a large fleet specially constructed for the purpose, but the design, which was never very seriously undertaken, was abandoned when he left the Admiralty in May 1915.

Against those who advocated such methods, it was contended that the enemy's great advantage lay in their central position and in the comparative shortness and complete security of their lines of communication, which enabled them to transfer troops from one front to another with the maximum of speed and the minimum of risk. If, therefore, the Allies sought to deliver their attack through Austria or through Turkey, they were increasing these very advantages which the Central Powers already possessed and increasing their own disadvantages by prolonging their lines of communication.

It was further argued by those who had studied military problems most deeply that no victory in the east could prove decisive in its effect upon the war so long as the principal enemy remained undefeated. That enemy was the German Army entrenched in France and Belgium. So long as it remained there the Allies could not be victorious, and so long as it remained there any weakening of the Forces that opposed it might result in the Allies' defeat.

The historian should beware of taking sides in controversies that must for ever remain controversial, and of asserting what would have occurred in hypothetical circumstances that never arose. He should be still more careful of

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attributing praise or censure to those who sincerely held opinions as to the wisest course to pursue in the interests of their country. But it is legitimate for him to remind readers of facts which throw light upon theories, and of actual experience from which lessons may be drawn. In two centuries the British Army has had repeated warnings by disaster of the danger of indulging in those diversions from the main theatre of war to which the term "side shows" has been applied. This experience was amplified and extended in the last war. While it is perfectly fair and just to argue that this expedition or the other might have succeeded, that indeed it ought to have done so, it is equally fair to reply that, as a matter of fact, it failed. While those who still speak and write of the fruitless slaughter in the west ought to remember that it was in the west that the war was won and that all that tragic slaughter bore its victorious fruit in the end.

The enemy's experiences are also instructive. They also were fighting on more than one front, they also had more than one school of strategy and, owing to their advantage, which has been already mentioned, their adventures in the east were more successful than those of the Allies. When we are told of the enormous advantages that would have accrued if we had knocked out Turkey, if we had forced Austria to make a separate peace, if we had prevented Bulgaria from coming in, we ought to remember that Germany did knock out Serbia, that she did knock out Roumania, that she did prevent Greece from coming in, and that she did dictate terms to Russia, one of the greatest and most powerful of her principal opponents, and yet she did not win the war, and could not win it so long as the French and British Armies held their ground and so long as the British Navy sailed the sea.

There could be little doubt which of the two contending theories would recommend itself to the mind of Sir

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Douglas Haig. He was by nature orthodox, and his profound studies of military history and science had strengthened his belief in the main tenets of military theory laid down by the great writers and practised by the great captains of the past. In his *Cavalry Studies*, published in 1907, he had written: "Napoleon's constant preoccupation, as must be that of every commander in the field, was how to reduce the number of troops employed on matters of secondary importance, in order to increase the numbers available for the decisive battle." And in the same chapter he quoted his master as having written in a report to Robespierre in 1794, "War must be waged on the same principle as a siege: fire must concentrate on a single point. Once a breach is made, the equilibrium is broken, the other defences become valueless and the place is taken. Attacks must not be scattered but concentrated."

When therefore it was suggested to him that Great Britain's military effort should be directed towards more than one theatre of war, he had no hesitation in forming his opinion of such a proposal. The first that he heard of it was at a conference with the Commander-in-Chief on January 4th. "Sir John French read a letter from K. in which the latter hinted that the New Army might be used better elsewhere than on the French frontier. A suggestion has been made of co-operating with Italy and Greece. I said that we ought not to divide our military force, but *concentrate on the decisive point* which is on this frontier against the German main Army. With more guns and ammunition and more troops the Allies were bound in the end to defeat the Germans and break through." To this opinion he steadfastly adhered for the next four years.

Sir John French shared this view, but he had not yet realised all that it implied in loss and sacrifice, in patience and tenacity. On January 20th, having recently returned

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from a visit to London, he "hazarded the opinion that the New Army was not likely to be here before June, by which time, he thought, the war would be over".

Haig entertained no such optimistic illusions, and the beginning of the new year saw him occupied, among other things, with finding suitable accommodation for himself and his staff. Though averse from luxury and every form of soft living, he appreciated comfort and liked to have his surroundings suitable to his position. It was not easy to find quarters that suited all his requirements, and his diary shows how much his choice was affected by consideration for others. At the end of 1914 he was living in a house at Lillers and he was advised to "turn the Maire out of his house and occupy it. He has a very fine house. But there is a Mrs. Maire who is full of determination. Personally I think an empty house best. We then have a kitchen to ourselves and our servants' big military boots won't cause annoyance to the owner of the carpets."

An old friend, Sir Henry McMahon, who was on his way to the East to take up the position of High Commissioner for Egypt, visited Haig in this house at Lillers towards the end of December. He was surprised in those sternly military surroundings to hear the voices of children playing in the passages. More than once during his visit one or two of them would burst into the room while the gravest matters were under discussion, and he remembers the smiling serenity with which the First Army Commander, upon whom such fearful responsibilities rested, would gently shoo these intruders back to their own quarters.

On January 3rd, he moved to a Château near the railway crossing on the road to Aire. "The house is in bad repair, but it has this advantage that there is nothing our servants can spoil." Probably few Army Commanders have allowed such considerations to influence their choice of quarters.

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When in the following month he moved into another house called Moulin le Comte, the owner was most hospitable. "He said we had only to ask for anything we wanted and he would do his best to place it at our disposal. All he asked was that his old servant might be free to cook his dinner daily. His dinner, he said, was a very simple repast. All his china, glass, tablecloths, silver, etc., were laid out for our dinner, also cooking pots, etc., in the kitchen given for the use of our servants. As we have our own mess kit, we have had our host's things put away after using them once, and thanking him for his kind hospitality." Such mutual courtesies contributed largely to the difficult task of maintaining happy relations between the members of a foreign army and the inhabitants of the country.

In this month of January, Sir Archibald Murray was succeeded as Chief of General Staff by Sir William Robertson. Haig's relations with Murray had always been most amicable, but he did not regret the change, believing that Robertson was the best man available for the post and one who enjoyed to a high degree the confidence of the Army. They worked together in complete harmony for the next three years, and there was no partnership throughout the history of the war upon which so much of the ultimate success depended.

Early in February Haig was asked to submit to G.H.Q. suggestions for an offensive, and he sent in his reply on the 12th. He recommended that:

"(a) The First Army be reinforced with a Corps and all available heavy guns and howitzers.

(b) Neuve Chapelle be attacked—(bombard and storm).

(c) Efforts should at once be made to enlarge the gap thus made in the enemy's line by capturing the Bois du Biez and pushing forward to Aubers village and ridge,

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and if possible to Fromelles village with the object of reaching the line Illies-Herlies.

(d) The French should be invited to co-operate by moving from the south-west towards Haisnes and against the south of La Bassée."

A few days later these proposals received the approval of Sir John French, and Haig learned subsequently that they coincided with striking similarity with a plan of attack independently put forward by General Joffre.

The forthcoming battle was to be the first of those long-prepared, carefully co-ordinated offensives which were to prove the principal feature of the war. And as it was the first, so also it proved the model upon which all the others were moulded. It has been claimed that if Napoleon had been present he would have found another and a better way. But Napoleon was not present, and the principal Generals of the two greatest military nations on the Continent could discover little during the next four years that had not been thought of by Douglas Haig in making his preparations for this, the first of the great offensives.

On February 15th, he held a conference with his three Corps Commanders, Monro commanding the I Corps, Rawlinson commanding the IV Corps and Sir James Willcocks commanding the Indian Corps. First he explained to them the general tactical idea and then he stated the special task which each Corps would be required to perform.

"I Corps must gain the Orchard near La Quinque Rue. Indian Corps would take the south end of Neuve Chapelle and then the Bois du Biez. The IV Corps the rest of Neuve Chapelle and then Aubers village. I hope to get an extra Division to relieve the 7th Division on my extreme left, so that the latter may be set free to operate from La Cordonnerie Farm.

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"Our attack cannot be made until the ground has dried, and probably a month will be required for our preparations. Some 15" Howitzers are expected this week. They would go on arrival to Messines and work under Second Army to start with, in the hope of making the enemy think that an attack was to be delivered from that quarter. I asked Corps Commanders to give me a written statement by Saturday, showing how they proposed to carry out the orders I had given them. On Monday next (22nd Feb.) I would hold another meeting with Corps Commanders and discuss their proposals. Meantime the following points should be considered:

1. Arrangements for bringing up the attacking troops in position of readiness near front line.

2. How to get over our own wire obstacles. All wire should now be put down with this object in view.

3. Study ground. Officers on the spot should correct maps daily. The enemy's wire to be marked on map, etc.

4. Guns to practise destroying enemy's wire.

5. Guns should be gradually and secretly placed in positions to suit the scheme of attack. Targets to be registered gradually, so as not to attract attention.

6. Most important. Officers should observe the enemy's line *daily* most closely. We want to locate his maxims.

7. Mountain artillery and machine guns should follow the assaulting parties, so as to get into action quickly in new position.

8. Mines. What can we do to defeat the enemy's mines?

9. Make saps with the object of supporting the attack.

10. Can we bring trench mortars into position secretly, so that a large number of them can be massed against points which we mean to take?"

On the following day he interviewed for the first time

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"Major Trenchard, who commands the Flying Wing under my orders. I told him the plan and asked for his proposals as to the allotment of aeroplanes for reconnaissance and also for Artillery observation." The future Air Marshal, then a comparatively junior officer, was much impressed by the frankness with which the Army Commander took him into his confidence, and also by his full appreciation of the importance of the Flying Corps, at which, as has been already stated, some of the older soldiers were still inclined to look askance.

Henceforth every day was devoted to the task of preparation. There were continual conferences with Corps Commanders, continual enquiries as to the needs of the different divisions, as to the most suitable location for artillery and as to the lie of the land and the state of the ground.

"The C.G.S. (Robertson) came to see me about 1 o'clock to tell me that full approval had been given by the C.-in-C. for the operations which I had suggested, so I could push on now as fast as possible. In reply to his questions as to possible date, I said that all depended on the weather. The rain of last Sunday flooded the country again, and threw operations back a week. But I said the end of the second week in March probably would find us ready, and the ground in a fit state for attacking over it. He said General Joffre had written suggesting the same move as I was engaged in preparing, to be made in co-operation with a move of the French Tenth Army from Arras towards Lens and Douai. This would mean that we will not now relieve the French Corps about Ypres. This is very satisfactory! Robertson was glad to inform me that 'all idea of a move along the coast had now gone from the Field Marshal's mind'. I said I hoped that Gough would not be taken away for a Division while I was in the midst of organising this operation.



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He agreed and said he would see my wish would have full consideration."

But on the following day Gough was to obey a more imperious summons. Visiting his old battalion of the Rifle Brigade in the vicinity of the front line, he was struck by a stray bullet and two days later he was dead. It was a loss to Haig, not only of a wise counsellor, but also of a dear friend. Gough died at 5 a.m. on the morning of February 22nd, and the news was brought to Haig at 6. There was a busy day before him, and every item in the programme, which began with a conference of Corps Commanders at ten, was carried out. But he was able to attend the funeral in the afternoon.

"The 2/Rifle Brigade (Gough's own battalion) found the Guards and Buglers. Colonel Stephens, commanding the battalion, came to me and said he hoped I did not consider him to blame, that it was a chance shot which had ricocheted off the Fauquissart high road, and many officers and men regularly walk on the path where the accident happened. He also said that General Gough at the time thought that he was seriously wounded, and asked him to tell me 'how grateful he (Gough) was for all my kindness to him'. After the funeral I rode back to Merville with Butler, Straker and Egerton. Thence by car to Moulin le Comte. The horses and part of my escort are billeted in Merville, so that I can be in closer touch with Rawlinson and the Fourth Corps in view of the impending attack.

"By Gough's death the Army loses a very capable soldier. Active in mind and body and with a charming manner, he made everything go smoothly and ensured orders being cheerfully obeyed. Only once throughout the whole war did I have to say a sharp word to him. It was during the Retreat on the night after the action at Villers-Cotterets. After dinner at Mareuil he in his impetuous way grumbled at my

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going on 'retreating and retreating'. As a number of the Staff were present, I turned on him rather sharply, and said 'that retreat was the only thing to save the Army, and that it was his duty to support me instead of criticising'. He was very sorry, poor fellow. We were great friends and he often used to say to me in the course of the operations that we were wasted together, as I did not need the help of a Staff Officer such as he, while he could well be doing more necessary work by keeping some feeble General straight!"

The next morning Sir William Robertson came to discuss the date of the offensive. "He told me that the French Parliament was pressing that General Joffre should gain ground and *do something*." That vague demand for undefined action was to come with increasing regularity from more than one Parliament during the next four years, and was to be varied only by criticism of such action as the demand produced. "Sir John has decided that we must do something about the 7th March, and 'it must be an offensive on a big scale'. I replied that owing to the waterlogged state of the ground the 10th March would be the very earliest date for my main attack, and even then we had only the means to carry out a small operation."

Haig's prognostication proved exact. Henceforward, March 10th was the date towards which he worked, and the date on which the attack was delivered. Preparations went on with increasing intensity as the date approached. Every day Haig visited the officers upon whom the principal responsibility would rest, and impressed upon them above everything the importance of making it plain to every subordinate exactly what his own part was to be. Each evening he would enter in his diary the opinion he had formed of the character and capacity of the officers he had interviewed.

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Every precaution was taken to prevent leakage of information. In order to deceive people living in the locality and to create the impression that the attack was coming from Béthune towards La Bassée, Haig gave orders that billets should be prepared for himself and his staff in Béthune, that a Reporting Centre should be set up there and that his flag should be hung outside the house selected for it.

On February 28th, he paid a visit to General de Maud'huy, commanding the French Tenth Army on his right. "I was very warmly received as he said we were old friends, having fought next to each other on the Aisne and having exchanged many letters, though this was the first time of our meeting. . . . He is a small, active man, about 58, sandy-coloured hair . . . quite the old type of Frenchman whom one has seen on the stage of the Louis XIV period."

The French General, however, could only offer assistance from his Artillery as he had not sufficient men in his sector to undertake an offensive.

The same day "Sir Pertab Singh came about 1.15 and said he had come to lunch. I was glad to see the old man. He was anxious to know when I thought 'charging time would come'. He thought in two months' time!" The old Indian warrior was not the only Cavalry man who was wondering when charging time would come, and some had cause for being even more optimistic, for Haig had asked for a Division of Cavalry to be moved up close to Choques in case he should succeed in breaking the enemy's line, and for a Cavalry Commander ("Hubert Gough for choice") to be attached to his staff during the operations "so as to be able to take advantage of any suitable situation which may arise".

On March 2nd, "I motored to Merville and conferred with Sir Henry Rawlinson at 12.30 a.m. regarding his pro-

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posed plan. As to the general scheme, I said that our objective was not merely the capture of Neuve Chapelle. Our existing line was just as satisfactory for us as if we were in Neuve Chapelle. I aimed at getting to the line Illies-Herlies and the line of the La Bassée road to Lille and thus cut off the enemy's troops occupying the front between Neuve Chapelle and La Bassée, and thus, if possible, break the enemy's front. It seemed to me to be desirable to make our plans on the chance of surprising the enemy, and with the definite objective of advancing rapidly (and without any check) in the hope of starting a *general advance*. The scheme of the 8th Division and that sent in by General Capper of 7th Division seemed to indicate a very limited objective. As to the proposal of the 8th Division to employ three Brigades in attacking Neuve Chapelle, I considered that even from an administrative point of view it would be better not to mix up the 3rd Brigade in the same trenches as the two others. And having in view the possibility of several days' fighting, it was important to keep troops as fresh as possible. Rawlinson quite agreed that two Brigades (each of five battalions) were quite sufficient for the objective."

The last general conference with regard to the forthcoming attack took place on March 5th. Haig's new Chief of General Staff, General R. Butler, who had succeeded Gough, accompanied him, and also General Mercer, his Chief of Royal Artillery. There were present as well as the three Corps Commanders and their principal Staff Officers, the Commanders of the 7th, 8th, and of the Meerut Divisions—a total of twenty-four.

"The following is a summary of my remarks:

"(1) We were embarking on a serious offensive movement with the object of breaking the German line. There is no idea of merely taking a trench here or a trench there. My

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object is to surprise the Germans, and push forward to the Aubers-Haute Pommerau ridge with *as little delay as possible*, and exploit the success gained by pushing forward mounted troops as quickly as possible so as to threaten La Bassée from the N.E. in which direction there are now no fortifications. The keynote of all the work is *offensive action*. Bombing parties must act offensively, trying to get forward on to the flanks. Infantry will advance first to enemy's front trenches, then beyond the village, next to Bois du Biez and Aubers ridge. Commanders must therefore consider *the employment of their reserves* so as to maintain the forward movement. . . .

"(2) At the same time, the principle of securing the ground already gained must not be overlooked.

"Any one of the following lines may be required to be held to meet a counter-attack.

(a) The main line of enemy's trenches.

(b) Line Port Arthur—Eastern edge of Neuve Chapelle—Moated Grange.

(c) The eastern edge of the Bois du Biez—Aubers.

(d) Ligny le Grand—Haute Pommerau—Aubers Ridge.

"(3) It may be necessary to advance the operations to a date before the 10th, either on account of the French situation on our right, or on account of the Germans anticipating us by attacking first.

"With reference to this:

(a) Gradually concentrate Corps farther forward so as to be able to act at once.

(b) Should our line near Neuve Chapelle be attacked, Divisional and Brigade Commanders must be ready to defeat the attack and then push forward at once on the heels of the retreating enemy. . . .

"(4) The First Corps and 7th Division must be ready to push in at any period even on the first morning of the

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attack. Arrangements must be made for artillery support with a view to this eventuality.

"The nature of the artillery bombardment was discussed and after hearing all sides, I decided that the total period of bombardment is to be 40 minutes. Rawlinson and Davies (commanding 8th Division) thought it would be well to stop for the day after reaching the east edge of the village. I said 'No'. The effect of the fire of this great mass of Artillery which we must use, must be most demoralising, consequently our advance must be as rapid as possible in order to take full advantage of the surprise and temporary demoralisation caused by such a sudden and heavy bombardment. If we delay, the enemy will be given time in which to bring up reserves of all kinds, including guns; consequently if we delay we must have a fresh bombardment.

"Sir James Willcocks said that all his subordinate commanders agreed that the Native regiments will fight well in Wednesday's operations, but he could not say what might happen if they had to resist several hot counter-attacks, and perhaps hold trenches for a week or more."

The final orders for the attack were sent out from Haig's headquarters at nine p.m. on March 8th, and the last two of the heavy guns arrived from England only on the morning of March 9th. At 7.30 a.m. on the 10th, the bombardment began.

In comparison with what was to come in the future the preliminary bombardment before the battle of Neuve Chapelle was insignificant, but nothing like it had been heard before in the history of the world. Simultaneously, as the hands of the clock pointed to the given hour, one hundred and fifty guns rent with a vast roar the silence of the morning. During the thirty-five minutes that followed, three thousand shells fell upon the German trenches, flat-

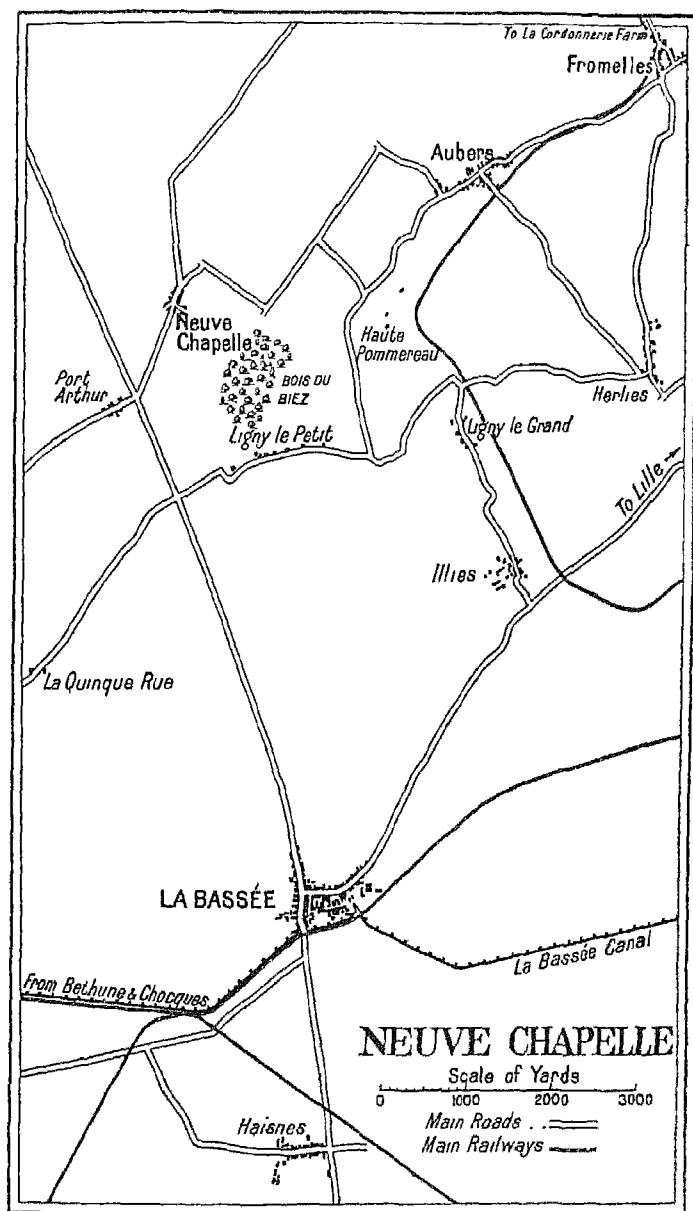
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tening the wire defences, obliterating the parapets and killing or wounding the majority of the defenders. At a prearranged moment, the belt of fire shifted from the enemy's front line to a line farther back, thus cutting off the retreat of the survivors, and, as the line of falling shells moved forward, the Infantry advanced to capture what remained of the enemy's battered trenches.

There were two occurrences that morning which delayed the general advance. On the right one Battalion of the Garhwal Brigade, part of the Indian Corps, lost direction, and instead of advancing straight to their front bore right and so came up against enemy trenches which had not been subjected to the preliminary bombardment, and also caused a gap to occur between themselves and the troops advancing on their left.

At the same time there had been a misfortune on the left, for the two siege batteries that had arrived only the day before had not had time to complete their gun platforms, so that accurate fire was impossible and, on the four hundred yards of frontage for which they were responsible, the German trenches were practically intact and the advancing British infantry were unable to make progress.

In the centre the attack was completely successful—and by nine o'clock Haig learnt that the village of Neuve Chapelle had been captured, but the delay caused by the difficulties on the right and left prevented any attempt to continue the advance until the afternoon, and in the interval the Germans had time to recover from the shock that the unexpected bombardment had given them, and had been able to organise and strengthen their new line of defence. Nevertheless, at the end of the day an advance had been made, and all the front-line defences of the enemy had been captured on a front of four thousand yards. Seven hundred and forty-eight prisoners had been taken.



Stanford London





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On the following day, Haig ordered the attack to be continued. Weather conditions proved less favourable, for a heavy mist prevented effective observation from the air. Further, the Germans were prepared for battle and not only offered an obstinate resistance, but also delivered vigorous counter-attacks which were successfully repulsed, but which obviated the possibility of an advance.

"Sir John French called to congratulate me on the result of yesterday. He said that he was most grateful and that he realised the fine state of the First Army was due to me. He was having an anxious time with the Second Army, and had been obliged to find fault with Smith-Dorrien."

The atmosphere was still more opaque the next morning, and the advance which had been timed for 10.30 was postponed till noon. Meanwhile, the Germans again attacked, in spite of the fog, and, although they were driven back with considerable loss, the British were unable to make any progress, for the sector of the front which faced them had been heavily reinforced. Haig was quick to appreciate the new situation and altered his plans in order to meet it. Abandoning the idea of continuing to hammer on the door that was now firmly barred and bolted, he gave instructions that the line now held should be strengthened with a view to its retention as a defensive position while the next blow should be delivered at some other point so as to take the enemy once more by surprise.

The battle of Neuve Chapelle may be therefore said to have ended on March 12th. Any further attack was, for the time being, rendered impossible by the shortage of ammunition. The experience gained on this occasion was of great value. The possibility of breaking into the enemy's line was proved, and also the great difficulty of converting an initial "break in" into a permanent "break through". The part played by weather conditions, especially by the

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mist, so frequent in Flanders, was significant and the destruction of telephone wires by bombardment, which broke down communications between Headquarters and the front line, proved the hopelessness of endeavouring to keep control over the later stages of a day's fighting.

The events of those two days produced a deep impression both on the enemy and on our Allies. The German front that faced the British Army was henceforth held in greater strength, and the French discarded any doubts they might have entertained as to the fighting value of the English. On March 13th, General de Maud'huy came to call on Haig. "The French are impressed with our success, and de Maud'huy spoke of our sudden surprise with satisfaction. He is ready to support me with anything but infantry which he has not got"; and on March 17th, an officer came from General Joffre's Headquarters "to compliment me on the success of the First Army. It was not only of value to the Allies from a military standpoint, he said, but also of great importance politically. Apparently there is much activity going on at present in the political world. Bulgaria is said to be ready to join the Allies now that we are 'near to Constantinople'."

Much activity certainly was going on in the political world during those fateful months of 1915, and Haig was thankful that such activity did not concern an Army Commander. He was able to take five days' leave at the end of March. There are not many men who, in his position, would not have welcomed the opportunity of visiting London in order to discuss recent events and the future with the powers that were, both at the War Office and in Downing Street. There were rumours already of great changes in the personnel of both military and civilian authorities. At such moments presence on the spot and personal contact may prove invaluable to the fortunes of an

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individual. It is typical of this great, simple, unselfseeking soldier, that he telegraphed to his wife to meet him at Folkestone, that he spent the whole of those five days alone with her, playing golf during the day and dining together at their lodgings in the evening, that he even respectfully declined a suggestion that he should go to London for an interview with the King, and that he returned to France without having seen a single individual in authority, but having refreshed his soul with five days of deep, untroubled peace.

## Chapter XI

### AUBERS RIDGE AND FESTUBERT

When Haig returned to France he found his Staff in great indignation over the official report of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, which the Commander-in-Chief had caused to be circulated. This report had naturally been drawn up at the Headquarters of the First Army under the supervision of General Butler, the Chief Staff Officer. When, however, the report was submitted to General Headquarters, instructions were received that for the words "General Officer Commanding the First Army" at the beginning of the report, there should be substituted "Commander-in-Chief"—it thus being made to appear that the whole plan had been worked out by Sir John French, who had, in fact, no hand in its preparation whatever. Haig's comment is characteristic—"The whole thing is so childish that I could hardly have credited the truth of the story had I not seen the paper. The main thing, however, is to beat the Germans *soon* and leave to the British Public the task of awarding credit for work done after peace has been made."

A few days later another incident occurred throwing a curious light upon the state of Sir John French's mind at this period. Haig had written a letter to Sir William Robertson stating his proposals for exploding mines and generally harassing the Germans during the next few weeks, and explaining a system of building shelters in the

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vicinity of the front line in order to deceive the enemy as to the exact position of the troops. He had concluded by suggesting that orders should be given to the Second Army to make similar arrangements. In reply he received a letter from the Commander-in-Chief practically telling him to mind his own business, and not to make suggestions with regard to troops other than those under his own command. "I infer", he wrote in his diary, "that something must have upset Sir John's balance of mind. Some think that Lord K. has found him out, as he has gone out of his way to assert his position. However, the only thing that one ought to consider is how best to act so as to end the war."

About the same time General Huguet, the head of the French mission, told Haig that General Foch was anxious to see him "but was desirous not to cause displeasure to Sir John French, who apparently does not like Foch to see any-one of the British Force except himself".

The fact that a man feels it is necessary to assert himself is a proof that he is conscious of his inferiority to the position that he holds. French was not jealous of Haig. He was too good a soldier and too true a comrade to allow petty jealousy to deflect his vision. But at the age of sixty-two he had been thrust into a position for which in his prime he had been hardly fitted, and he felt that if once he lost hold upon the outward semblance of authority he would become a mere feather on the sea of events which were too vast for his control or for his comprehension.

He saw the war, still anticipating an early conclusion, as an incident, like the war of South Africa, in the career of professional soldiers. On April 19th, as they were driving together, he asked Haig if he would like to go to India as Commander-in-Chief. "I said I would go wherever the Government wished me, but we had to end the war first. He said after the war it might suit me to go there for two

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years. In my opinion it is better to wait till the end of the war. Perhaps there may not be a Commander-in-Chief in India then."

That same day Foch had luncheon with Haig, who was fully alive to the importance of making acquaintance and sharing experiences with the outstanding personalities of the French Army.

"General Foch (commanding the group of French Armies in Northern France) with his Chief of Staff (Weygand) and A.D.C. came to lunch at 12 o'clock. After lunch he questioned me closely about my views on the attack at Neuve Chapelle. He had been told by General Joffre to 'study the method of attack adopted by the British'. Indeed, all French Corps Commanders had been directed to study what had been done. General Foch is the writer of *Les principes de la Guerre* and is regarded in the French Army as their most capable general. So it was a compliment that he should have come to ask me for information, and showed the French to be now in a very different attitude of mind to that assumed by them at the beginning of the campaign. Hitherto they have looked upon us rather as 'amateurs' than as 'professional' soldiers.

"In talking of our future plans, I urged the necessity for the French to press the enemy about Haisnes so as to prevent him detaching troops to oppose our advance on the north side of the canal. Foch would say nothing more definite than that he would support me with five heavy batteries, and that his main attack would be made at a point farther south. He told me how during peace he and the French Staff had studied about the possibilities of fighting in every part of France except Flanders! They never thought a French Army would ever have to fight there."

Foch was not the only one who had been impressed by the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. Lord Esher, who was in

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France at this time, told Haig that the officers of the French Army whom he had seen "were much impressed with our recent success at Neuve Chapelle. Until then they had said that our troops were all right on the defensive but could not attack. . . . Lord Esher also told me he had met an American during the winter who had just returned from Berlin, where he dined with the Kaiser. The latter said that the 'I Army Corps under Douglas Haig is the best in the world'. This was after our retreat from Belgium, the battle of the Aisne and the battle of Ypres. Esher said the Kaiser emphasised 'D.H. in command'. In my opinion, however, 'the command' greatly depended on the excellent Staff which had worked together in peace and had been trained with the troops at Aldershot.

"Anyhow in my view the praise is a compliment to Aldershot methods, and is a valuable one because it is made by one who ought to be a judge for he has had much experience of good and bad Army Corps, both under his Command as well as opposed to him."

It was on April 22nd that the second Battle of Ypres began, when for the first time the Germans made use of poison gas with far greater effect than they had themselves anticipated or were prepared to follow up. The First Army, however, took no part in this battle beyond sending reinforcements and endeavouring to learn from it such lessons as might prove of assistance in the future.

Meanwhile the First Army was preparing for an attack, the delivery of which was continually delayed for one cause or another. Haig's plan on this occasion was not to have a limited objective as at Neuve Chapelle, but to press forward as far as circumstances would permit. The attack was to be undertaken in co-operation with the French Tenth Army, who were on the right of the British First Army. As Commander of the former, General d'Urbal had



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recently succeeded General de Maud'huy, a change which Haig regretted as he and General de Maud'huy had always been on the best of terms with one another.

On May 9th, after many consultations with Corps and Divisional Commanders and after the most elaborate preparations, the attack was delivered. The plan was simple. The I Corps on the right and the Indian Corps in the centre were to advance due east, while the IV Corps on the left were to advance south-east, joining up with the rest of the Army eventually, and cutting off a large detachment from the enemy's forces.

This attack, which is known as the Battle of Aubers Ridge, proved a complete failure. The Germans had learnt the lesson of Neuve Chapelle as thoroughly as had the Allies, and they had spent the interval in transforming what had hitherto been mere trenches into strongly fortified lines of defence, with dugouts of a new pattern which resisted bombardment, with machine guns at intervals of twenty yards or less, built into the outer side of the breast work and firing through steel-rail loopholes near the level of the ground. The result was that when, after the preliminary bombardment, the troops advanced confidently to the attack they were met by a withering sheet of machine gun fire that nothing could withstand. The first attack was delivered at five a.m., a second at eight, and a third at four in the afternoon. But despite the gallantry of the troops, nothing could be accomplished, and on the following day it was decided to postpone further operations.

The principal cause of the failure was the unsuspected improvement in the German methods of defence, but Haig was further hampered by the insufficiency and inferior quality of his ammunition. Sir John French was about to launch a press campaign against the Government and Lord Kitchener based upon their alleged neglect to provide the

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necessary ammunitions of war. It was doubtless in connection with that campaign, and in the hope of obtaining useful evidence, that in the afternoon of May 9th Lord Brooke arrived at Haig's Headquarters in company with Colonel Repington, the military correspondent of *The Times*, who was staying with French. "In reply to a request to see me I said that neither I nor my Staff had authority to see any newspaper correspondents, and that all information for the press must be obtained from G.H.Q. I saw Guy Brooke and explained the situation." He makes no further comment on the incident.

No more unjust criticism can be brought against the military qualities of Haig than to suggest that he was incapable of realising when he was pursuing the wrong method, and of changing his tactics in order to meet an altered situation. He was quick to appreciate that the form of attack which had proved so successful at Neuve Chapelle would no longer serve against the more elaborate defences which the Germans had established in the interval. It was on May 9th that the attack had been delivered. On the 10th he decided to abandon it and on the 11th, having collected all the information available and taken counsel with those who were best qualified to advise, he made the following entry in his diary:

"The conclusions I arrived at are:

- "(1) The defences in our front are so carefully and so strongly made and mutual support with machine guns is so complete, that in order to demolish them a long methodical bombardment will be necessary by heavy artillery (guns and howitzers) before infantry are sent forward to attack. . . .
- (2) To destroy the enemy's 'material'—60 pr. guns will be tried, as well as the 15", 9.2" and 6" siege hows. Accurate observation of each shot will be arranged so as to make sure of flattening out the enemy's 'strong points' of support, be-

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fore the infantry is launched. . . . (3) To destroy the physical power of the enemy, and shatter the nerves of the men who work his machine guns, the bombardment will be carried on during the night as well as by day. To start with we must at sunset threaten an attack, so as to induce the enemy to fill his trenches, and then bombard at intervals during the night both on the trenches, and the approaches to them. This bombardment, at a slow rate of fire, should be continued during the next day, till the hostile defences are really destroyed. The assault is to be postponed till this is reported, and until our guns have also mastered the enemy's artillery. The objection to threatening an attack at dusk, together with a bombardment is that it will cause the enemy to shell our trenches during the night and so prevent our troops from forming up for the attack. . . ."

In accordance with these principles it was arranged that the bombardment of the German position was to begin in the early morning of May 13th and to go on continuously for two days. Unfortunately the weather, which was to prove a bad friend to the Allies throughout the war, diminished the effect of this tremendous bombardment. Shells falling on ground that is soft and sodden with rain have less effect than those that fall upon hard ground, and the attack which was to have taken place on May 14th was therefore postponed for twenty-four hours.

In order that the element of surprise might not be lacking, Haig had arranged to open operations with a night attack which was delivered at eleven-thirty on the night of May 15th. It proved on the whole successful. It was followed by half an hour's bombardment beginning at two forty-five a.m., and then a further attack at another part of the line. Haig spent the day visiting the Divisional Commanders to congratulate them upon such success as had been achieved and to take counsel as to further action. The

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2nd and 7th Divisions had both gained ground, but a gap strongly held by the enemy now divided their two advanced positions, and it was decided that the next day should be devoted to filling it up. Unfortunately, it was not realised at the time that the Germans had in fact retired to another defensive line, leaving only small detachments in their former positions, and taking advantage of the delay that these caused to consolidate their new defences.

For nearly a fortnight the battle raged with varying fortunes. Haig was given a completely free hand in the conduct of it, receiving from time to time messages of congratulation and encouragement from the Commander-in-Chief. On the night of May 17th "Sir John French called me up on the telephone to say he felt he could not retire to rest without telling me how grateful he was for the splendid work done by the First Army." On the following day he "came to see me at Merville. . . . He thanked me profusely for our success and said he did not wish to interfere in my plans in any way. That my way was a damned good way, etc." Messages of congratulation were also received from Generals Foch and d'Urbal.

The danger of permitting newspaper correspondents to visit the battlefield was strikingly illustrated during the fighting. On May 21st "Report received that Observation Station of heavy Artillery at La Couture was heavily shelled yesterday (Thursday). This it is considered was due to an article in *The Times* of the 18th instant by 'Our Military Correspondent', in which he stated that he got 'an excellent view from La Couture of the German position which we attacked, and that the heavy battery on his right rear made most excellent practice' or words to that effect. I at once wrote to C.G.S. and recommended that no newspaper correspondent be allowed to come so close to the front during active operations."

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On May 24th "After lunch Sir John French and Lord Esher came to see me. Both seemed in good health and spirits. Sir John thinks that once the French get the plateau above Vimy, the German line will be forced to go back all along the ridge by Soissons, Rheims, etc. He told me that General Joffre wishes to come and see me, to thank the First Army for what it has accomplished. Probably on Thursday, and he would like to see some of our troops. Detailed orders will be sent.

"As regards the Dardanelles, I gathered from Lord Esher that Admiral Carden was the only sailor who thought the attack was a practical proposition."

On the next day the following verbal orders were brought from G.H.Q. by General Maurice:

(1) Attack is threatened against Ypres, so be careful of ammunition.

(2) The frontage of another Division south of Vermelles is to be taken over from the French beginning on Thursday night.

(3) Offensive of First Army is to be limited to small aggressive threats which will not require much ammunition or many troops.

This seemed to mark the end of the battle, but it continued for yet two more days, for on the following morning French himself appeared at Haig's headquarters and said he was not to consider the order he had received the day before as binding, and that he was "to carry on as he considered best". Little further was achieved, but in spite of violent counter-attacks from the enemy who were endeavouring to regain the ground they had lost, the British succeeded in maintaining their position.

The results of the battle were upon the whole satisfactory, and tended to convince those who were responsible that they were proceeding upon the right lines. Proof had been

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established that it was possible to drive the enemy from their position, however strongly that position might be held. The doubts which the first attack on Aubers Ridge had aroused were thus dispelled. It seemed also to those who had been directing the attack that if they had had fresh troops and larger supplies of ammunition with which to press home their initial advantage, the result might have been far more decisive. That such surmises were well founded is now proved by the fact that they were shared by the enemy who considered that on the 17th their situation was extremely precarious, and who were compelled to bring reserves from several other sectors of the line in order to maintain it.

During the interval between the Battle of Festubert and the next attack Haig entertained at his Headquarters various visitors of different types. The first was General Joffre, who inspected the 7th Division. "Three Brigades were drawn up in mass in a grass field. We walked down the line then the troops marched away by fours. They looked very fine. The 1st Grenadier Guards and 2nd Scots Guards now have finer men than in peace time. The three Brigades of Infantry number 283 officers and 11,351 other ranks. The losses of this Division in recent fighting amount to nearly 4000. After looking at the Infantry I took General Joffre across the road where the Divisional Artillery was drawn up under Brig.-General Birch. Gen. Joffre expressed himself as greatly pleased and said the troops looked magnificent. He also said that he had for long wished to come and see me personally, as the troops under my command had always fought so well throughout this campaign."

A few days later Mr. Asquith arrived. Haig took particular pains to show the Prime Minister everything that could possibly interest him, and "Mr. Asquith was most enthusiastic about all he had seen, and on bidding goodbye he

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asked me to write to him whenever I could spare the time. It was interesting to see Mr. Asquith having tea with General Gough as his host after the dealings they had together in the spring of 1914 after the Curragh incident." Haig possibly retained prejudices against one who was both a politician and a Liberal, although he makes no record of them in his diary, and it is plain that at this first interview there was laid the foundation of that sincere respect and admiration which the soldier came to feel for the statesman.

A few days later at a meeting with the Commander-in-Chief "Sir John stated that the Prime Minister had expressed himself as greatly pleased with his visit to the First Army and (for my own information) had drawn comparisons between the First and Second Armies greatly to the disparagement of the latter. Sir John attributed this difference to the way in which Smith-Dorrien interfered with his Brigadiers and others under him, so that no one knew exactly what was wanted. I said I thought I had an advantage in having had two Divisions complete under my command for over two years at Aldershot. We had tried to arrive at a common 'doctrine', and my subordinate Commanders realised the importance of discipline, and had maintained it."

But Haig's visitors were not confined to Generals and Prime Ministers. On June 11th "Ben Tillett, the leader of the dockers and strikers, came to see me. He seems to have been quite converted from his anarchist views, and has his heart now thoroughly impressed with the necessity of getting the labour class to help to end the war. With this in view, he has come out here to see some of his old docker friends who are now soldiers, and is then going to stump the country on his return to England. After going round a few units he came to lunch, he was accompanied by a French Socialist, a M. Broule, a truly patriotic Frenchman.

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Tillett confessed to me how he had been mistaken about the British officer. At first his impressions were derived from the picture papers and Society journals. He thought them 'fops and snobs'. He is astonished now to find that 'his friends' have unbounded confidence in their officers, and could not get on without them. His experiences in Germany before the war, where he attended a conference of Socialists at Munich, were most interesting, and showed clearly how the German Socialist is first of all a German soldier before everything else. Ben Tillett is a small active little man, a good speaker, and seems most determined about the cause he has now taken up. I think it is a very good thing that he has come and visited the troops at the Front. He expressed himself as most grateful for my help."

During these weeks Haig was busily preparing for the next attack which he had been asked to undertake in order to assist the French offensive in Artois. This, he had decided, should be a comparatively small affair, and after many postponements it was eventually delivered after forty-eight hours' bombardment at six o'clock in the evening of June 15th. The results were singularly disappointing. Despite the prolonged bombardment the enemy's front line seemed to be as strongly held as ever, and despite the unusual hour of the attack the enemy seemed to be perfectly prepared for it. On the following afternoon the attack was repeated, but the result was even less satisfactory and the casualties were more severe. "It is difficult", was Haig's comment, "to discover the cause of failure. The Scottish Rifles attacked with splendid gallantry and great vigour, but the enemy was able to man the parapet sufficiently to beat off the attack. It is thought that the enemy dugouts here are very low down, 15 or 16 feet below ground."

The following passage from the diary, dated June 25th,



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is a refutation of the statement that has sometimes been made to the effect that Haig was slow to appreciate the changing demands made upon the inventive powers of the country by the developments of the war, and the importance of promoting younger men to command.

"General Phillips (a Welsh M.P.) assistant to Mr. Lloyd George (Minister for Munitions of War), with General Du Cane came to lunch. We discussed the nature of guns and ammunition most required. I said large numbers of *heavy* guns and howitzers because enemy's defences had become so strong. We ought to aim at having enough guns to engage enemy on a front of 25 to 30 miles, while retaining in addition a strong central Reserve. After wearing down the enemy, the Reserve should be sent in to attack at whatever point the enemy appeared weakened. By this means the decisive attack would come as a surprise. This can never be the case if an attack is made on a narrow front. Owing to the present strong defences, the enemy is able to hold up any attack long enough to enable his Reserves to arrive before the line is pierced.

"I suggested a small calibre gun for counter-battery work, like Naval 12 pdr., to save the large heavy shells. We have 14 types of hand-bombs, only two types should be provided. Develop the bomb mortars so as to supplement the heavy artillery. Produce a trench mortar to throw a 100 lb. shell of high explosive up to 500 yards. A *lighter* machine gun, with tripod and gun in one part, is a necessity. Mobility is most important. Captive balloons are required to supplement aeroplane observation.

"Daggers or short bayonets are being used in trenches. I gave him a French pattern dagger to show Lloyd George and to return to Doris at Farnborough Hill. (General d'Urban sent it to me as a present).

"In the afternoon I rode to Hinges, and round by the

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canal westwards and then back by Goncghem, where a Canadian Brigade is billeted.

"I wrote to Mr. Asquith as requested by him. I discussed nature of operations and need for *heavy* guns and ample ammunition.

"But even if ample guns and ample ammunition, etc., be provided, progress will be disappointing unless young capable Commanders are brought up to the Front. Some of the present Captains should be chosen to command Battalions, Majors Brigades, etc."

It was about this time that the Cabinet, growing nervous in view of the stationary situation that seemed to have arisen in France, and of the failure to force the Dardanelles, asked Sir John French and Sir William Robertson to appear before them, and to indicate what they considered would be the best line of retreat. "Poltroons!" was Robertson's indignant comment in a letter to Haig, and he went on to emphasise the importance which he attached to keeping the British Army in touch with the French. The alternative view, which was held by Sir John French, was that the Channel ports were so vital to England's safety that they must at all costs be defended even if it necessitated separating our Army from that of our Allies. This had been from the beginning of the war the one most disputed point of strategy on the Western Front, and it was to remain so almost until the end. Haig's view was perfectly clear and definite now, as it was to prove in March 1918.

"It is obvious that the occupation of the Channel ports cannot decide the issue of the war, but without them our operations would be greatly hampered. On the other hand, if the enemy inflicts a decisive defeat on the French, the British could not fight on land without Allies. In my opinion, therefore, the important thing is for the British Army to remain united with the French. When the German

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Army was much more efficient than it is now, it failed against the two Allies united. If, however, the British were to separate and to take up a position in front of Calais and Boulogne, it would certainly mean defeat in detail, because the enemy could contain us with a comparatively small force, while he massed in great strength and defeated the French.

"Robertson wishes to discuss the problem with me and will come to see me Tuesday. Apparently there is no 'Direction' of the war in London, but British strategy seems to be guided by the most persuasive talker, Winston, for instance! The cause of this is the obliteration of the General Staff in London. It must be re-established and allowed to function."

Kitchener visited Haig at his Headquarters on July 8th, and on the same day Mr. Asquith came to luncheon and afterwards had an hour's conversation with him alone when they discussed:

"(1) Proportion of heavy guns to field guns required. I said out of three guns one should be heavy, and gave him on paper the number required to attack on a 25-mile front.

"(2) Nature of our defence lines.

"(3) Machine guns.

"(4) Necessity for promoting young officers to high command. To make room some of the old ones must be removed. We went through the lists of Major Generals, etc., in the Army List. I said it was important to go down low on the list and get young, capable officers. He agreed."

On July 9th Haig left for six days' leave in England. He intended, as on the previous occasion, to spend the time quietly with his wife by the sea. Alan Fletcher, his aide-de-camp, had lent him a house at Westgate, where he spent five out of the six days. But when it was conveyed to him in the most tactful manner that the King would be pleased

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to see him, he felt that he could not again ignore a request of such a nature, and on July 14th he travelled to London, returning the same night. At his interview with His Majesty the war in all its phases was discussed, and the two found themselves in substantial agreement both as regards principles and personalities. Before leaving he received the G.C.B. from the King's hands, who said that nobody had more thoroughly earned it.

In the afternoon he visited Lord Kitchener at the War Office. The interview was extremely friendly. "We spoke about the nature of the operations in Flanders. K. seemed to me very ignorant of what is being done, and how trenches are attacked and how bombarded. He admitted that the nature of the modern lines of defence was quite new to him, and he said he 'felt quite at sea' on the subject. I respected him for being so honest. As regards Artillery, he did not know the term 'counter battery', or how some guns were told off to deal with hostile infantry and some with the hostile guns. I gave him Brig.-General Birch's name as that of an up-to-date gunner. I suggested a light 12-pdr. Naval gun, firing shrapnel, with a long range, for dealing with hostile Artillery, i.e. counter-battery work. This seemed a novel idea to K., but when I said the object was to save our big heavy shells, he seemed quite interested."

On July 17th he returned to France.

## Chapter XII

### LOOS

**I**n his *Cavalry Studies*, published in 1907, to which allusion has already been made, Haig had written, "Military History teaches us that the whole question of co-operation with an ally is fraught with difficulties and danger." Already in the first summer of the war such difficulties were beginning to occur and such danger had to be faced.

Joffre had elaborated an extensive plan of attack which, in his own words, would "compel the Germans to retreat beyond the Meuse and possibly end the war". The main principle of this plan was based upon two separate lines of advance, one directed from west to east and the other from south to north, converging ultimately upon the same point. A glance at the map will show how there was at this time a vast bulge in the German line of battle. Joffre purposed to advance against this bulge from Artois in the west and from Champagne in the south. He desired that the British should attack on the left of his own Tenth Army, north of Lens and south of the La Bassée Canal. Haig's views had been asked for by the Commander-in-Chief, and after carefully reconnoitring the ground and taking counsel with his Corps Commanders, he had reported upon it most unfavourably.

"I came to the conclusion", he writes, "that it would be possible to capture the enemy's first line of trenches (say a length of 1200 yards) opposite Maroc (i.e. west of Loos),

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but it would not be possible to advance beyond, because our own artillery could not support us, as ground immediately in front cannot be seen from any part of our front. On the other hand the enemy has excellent observing stations for his artillery. . . . The enemy's defences are now so strong that, sufficient ammunition lacking to destroy them, they can only be taken by siege methods—by using bombs, and by hand to hand fighting in the trenches—the ground above is so swept by gun and machine gun and rifle fire that an advance in the open, except by night, is impossible.”

These views, forcibly expressed, were duly conveyed to G.H.Q., and at the same time it was suggested that if, in spite of them, an offensive were considered imperative, only subsidiary attacks should be made south of the canal, and that the main attack should be made astride and north of it with a view to capturing Auchy village and the spur that runs eastward from Givenchy, thereby threatening Violaines and the town of La Bassée.

“Unfortunately,” says the Official Historian, “in spite of this outspoken warning, the truth of which was evident and which was justified by events, continued pressure from General Joffre led to the offensive being eventually ordered.”

It would be unjust to blame Sir John French for giving way to the French Commander-in-Chief. His original instructions had been to conform so far as possible with the wishes of our Allies. The force under his command was still so inferior in numbers to that which Joffre commanded as hardly to give him a status of equality with his colleague. And, above all, the maintenance of happy relations between the two peoples was of such paramount importance as to justify serious risks being taken in order to secure it. About this time Captain Gemeau, a French liaison officer attached to Haig's headquarters, informed

him, after a visit to Joffre's headquarters at Chantilly, that "he was much surprised to find a feeling amongst French civilians, and in the Army too, of doubt as to the real determination and ability of the British Government to bring the war to a successful conclusion." One factor which had caused much misgiving was the despatch of four Divisions of the New Army, with much ammunition, to the Dardanelles, while "the British force in France is being starved for ammunition. . . .

"The Russians are also beginning to criticise the work of the French and British. They say that we on the Western Front are not sufficiently aggressive, with the result that the Germans have been able to withdraw troops from here to fight against Russia. The failure of England and France to supply Russia with ammunition, as promised, has also caused disappointment. But this kind of bickering is to be expected among allies. The important point seems to me to be to prevent the peace party in France from gaining the upper hand, otherwise they will make peace in the autumn."

Ill-founded as we now know these mutual misgivings to have been, they constituted from the beginning almost to the end of the war a very grave danger to the Allied cause. No greater disaster could have occurred than a serious rift between the Allies, and both on this occasion and upon many subsequent ones the importance of this consideration should be borne in mind before judgment is passed on soldiers and politicians for acquiescing in a policy although not entirely convinced of its wisdom.

On August 7th Haig wrote:

"I attended Conference at St. Omer with Sir John French and his C.G.S. (Robertson). Sir John explained his negotiations with Generals Foch and Joffre and read two letters from the latter. Sir John agreed entirely with the

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views I had expressed in my written report (dated 23rd July) as to the best point for my Army to attack, and he had repeated them to General Joffre, but at the same time he (Sir John) had said that he would do whatever Joffre wishes in the matter. The latter now wished the British Army to attack between the canal to La Bassée and our right, which is opposite Loos, with the object of taking Hill 70 and the ridge to the north of it near Hulluch. This will cover the left flank of the French Tenth Army in its attack on the Vimy plateau.

"Sir John has decided to comply with General Joffre's wishes, even though he disagrees with the plan. I am therefore to work out proposals for giving effect to the decision, but my attack is to be made chiefly with artillery, and I am not to launch a large force of infantry to the attack of objectives which are so strongly held as to be liable to result only in the sacrifice of many lives. That is to say, I am to assist the 'French, by neutralising the enemy's artillery and by holding the hostile infantry on my front'."

The decision having been taken, Haig immediately set about doing all in his power to implement it successfully. On the same day he instructed Rawlinson, commanding the IV Corps, to send in proposals for the capture of Hill 70 and the ridge north of it near Hulluch, and on August 15th he held a conference at his headquarters, which he had recently moved forward to the Château of Hinges, when he discussed the situation with his Corps Commanders.

"... I explained that the French would soon take the offensive on a large scale. I had been ordered by G.H.Q. to support the French Tenth Army on my right, which would attack with the object of gaining the Vimy plateau and the plain of Douai. Our object would be first the line Loos-Hulluch, and then Pont à Vendin. The thickly popu-



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lated district about Lens, which is a mass of workmen's houses and factories, would thus be turned on the south by the French and on the north by the British. In the first instance, we will assist the French by neutralising the hostile Artillery and by holding the enemy's infantry on our front. At the same time, all available troops will be held in readiness to advance as soon as an opportunity for doing so is afforded. With this in view, the I and IV Corps will be concentrated between the La Bassée Canal and our right. The I Corps will still hold Givenchy with a Brigade.

"The G.O.C. IV Corps will submit proposals for

(a) Securing the German front system of trenches west of Loos, joining up the captured trenches with our present line, and consolidating the position gained.

(b) A subsequent advance with a view to capturing first Loos and then Hill 70, on the assumption that the progress of the French makes such an attack possible.

"The G.O.C. I Corps will submit proposals for

(a) The capture of the Hohenzollern Redoubt, and of such of the German defences in that locality as might be included in that attack, and the consolidation of the position gained.

(b) A subsequent advance on Hulluch.

"The employment of asphyxiating gas in connection with these attacks is also to be considered.

"Some additional heavy Artillery will also be available—about 48 guns and howitzers. This will be a valuable reinforcement provided adequate ammunition comes also.

"Arrangements for these attacks should be completed by the first week in September, but from my experience of the French I did not think that they would be ready before the 15th September."

On August 17th Haig had luncheon with French and discussed the forthcoming attack. According to the entry

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made the same day in his diary, he then insisted on the importance of his being provided with sufficient Reserves to ensure the success of the operation. At the same interview French warned him "not to talk about the forthcoming operations to Lord Kitchener", who was arriving in France that day on a short visit; "If Lord K. were to know," said French, "he would tell the others in the Cabinet and then all London would know. And the Germans would also get to hear of the proposed attack."

That French should have lacked confidence in Kitchener's discretion is less surprising than that he should have thought it possible to conceal from the Secretary of State for War the decision to deliver the most important Anglo-French offensive that had yet taken place. Kitchener was of course perfectly aware of all that was intended, and discussed the prospects with Haig when he visited the First Army two days later.

"After washing his hands, Lord K. came into my writing room upstairs saying he had been anxious to have a few minutes' talk with me. The Russians, he said, had been severely handled, and it was *doubtful how much longer their army could withstand the German blows*. Up to the present he had favoured a policy of active defence in France until such time as all our forces were ready to strike. The situation which had arisen in Russia had caused him to modify these views. He now felt that the Allies must act vigorously in order to take some of the pressure off Russia if possible. He had heard, when with the French, that Sir J. French did not mean to co-operate to the utmost of his power when the French attacked in September. He (Lord K.) had noticed that the French were anxiously watching the British on their left! And he '*had decided that we must act with all our energy, and do our utmost to help the French, even though, by so doing, we suffered very heavy losses indeed*'.

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"I replied that my Army was all ready to attack. All we wanted was ammunition. He said we would get all he had."

Kitchener also discussed with Haig and his four Corps Commanders the desirability of conscription and gave them his views on the subject.

" 'Briefly, if compulsory service were passed by Parliament now,' he said, 'there would be so many exceptions made, that it would be useless for the Army. He did not propose to run any risks, but to wait until the register had been compiled and scrutinised. He could then see whether it would be an advantage or not to have conscription.' He asked our views and appealed to me first. I said that, in view of the severe losses incurred by Russia recently, the Army of England had become the deciding factor in the war. It was vitally important to have every available man trained as a soldier. Also, to adopt compulsory service would hearten our Allies and show that we were in earnest, and depress our enemies to a corresponding degree. In my opinion, it would be well to run all the risks to which Lord Kitchener had alluded, in order to have conscription. All the four Corps Commanders agreed with what I had said, and added that compulsory service would improve the discipline of the Army. Lord K. argued strongly against compulsory service, but he told me afterwards that he was himself undecided yet what was best, and that he only wanted to do what was for the good of the country."

On August 23rd Haig received definite instructions to have his attack ready to be delivered on September 8th, and at the same time he was informed that no limit should be set to the distance to which he was prepared to advance. On the following day French came to discuss details and it was agreed that, if the weather permitted, poison gas should be used for the first time by the British Army. The normal

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wind on this part of the front was west or south-west, which was, of course, suitable from the Allies' point of view.

On August 29th the date of the attack was postponed by the French from September 8th to September 15th, and a few days later it was further postponed until September 25th. These continual postponements, which were the fate of most offensives during the war, were highly undesirable as, when once an attack had been decided upon, every day that it was postponed increased the chances of the enemy coming to hear of it. Haig wrote in his diary on this occasion, "This extra delay may well jeopardise the success of what I am undertaking, because at present we know that the enemy's troops have no proper protection against gas, only small respirators. They may hear of our getting up the gas cylinders and issue effective gas helmets. On the other hand it would be foolish for a portion of the Allies to attack until the whole are ready for a combined effort.

"On September 6th at 10.30 I held a conference of all Corps Commanders, Commanders of Royal Artillery and Senior Staff Officers of Corps. Commanders of Divisions and Senior General Staff Officers which are attacking were also present. These with my senior Officers made up a total of 53. We just managed to get into my dining room. Behind me I had a map showing the main German communications in France, and another map of the front of my Army and the country as far east as Carvin and Lille.

"I explained that the situation in Russia *obliged* the Allies to abandon their defensive attitude in the west, and to attack before all their resources had been organised ; I told them what orders I had received and what I understood the French were going to do: namely, make a general attack along the whole front, including two main efforts, the one near Arras, the other near Rheims. Thus the German salient will be attacked on its two flanks. Looking

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at the map and trying to apply strategical principles 'to get on the enemy's rear and cut his communications', I argued that the French Army on my right, after reaching Douai, would move on to Valenciennes and so eastwards on Liège, while the Army from Rheims must advance in the direction Hirson-Namur so as to shatter the enemy between them. My orders are to break the enemy's front and reach Pont à Vendin. With this objective the IV Corps and I Corps will attack south of the La Bassée Canal. The Indian Corps and III Corps must also attack to the full extent of their power with the objects of (a) holding as many of the enemy as possible in their front and so preventing his detaching troops from counter-attacking the I Corps left—and (b) finding out when the enemy begins to weaken in order to be in a position to pursue as vigorously as possible. If the enemy still hold on in their front in strength, then the concentrated Divisions must be ready to march and support the I and IV Corps by the gap which it is expected they will make. There must be the greatest energy and determination everywhere.

"I also considered the possible troops which the enemy could bring against us from day to day, and gave some instructions regarding the use of gas."

On the 12th Foch paid Haig a visit, the real object of which, in the latter's opinion, "was to find out whether we British really meant to fight or not". Haig endeavoured to convince him on that point and assured him that "Joffre's orders were the same to me as those of Marshal French". He also took this opportunity of impressing upon Foch the importance of having the Reserves close up to the battle line and asked him to speak to French on the subject, for already he was feeling uneasiness owing to French's reluctance to put sufficient Reserves at his disposal, and to place them where they would be readily available.

## LOOS

On the 18th there was a meeting at G.H.Q. to discuss the forthcoming offensive when Haig discussed this all-important question of Reserves with the Commander-in-Chief. "I urged the importance of having General Reserve (which the C.-in-C. retains under G.H.Q.) with the head of its two Divisions at Noeux-les-Mines and Verquin, respectively, by *the morning* of the 25th. Sir John seemed to think that was too close up."

On the following day "written instructions at last received from G.H.Q. regarding the attack. The Reserves are not to reach the area south of Lillers till 24th. This is too late! So I send Butler with a letter to see the C.G.S. on the subject, and repeat what I said at the C.-in-C.'s conference yesterday. The head of the two leading Divisions of the Reserve Corps should be at Noeux-les-Mines and Verquin by the night of 24th-25th September. Butler got back about 3 p.m. and reported that C.G.S. would arrange for the Divisions to be disposed as desired by me, and would issue orders accordingly."

Apart from the question of the Reserves the main source of Haig's anxiety was connected with the decision to make use of poison gas. An army's first experiment in real warfare with a weapon that they have never employed before must always be attended by considerable doubt and uncertainty, which were increased upon this occasion by the fact that the weapon in question could only be made use of if a sufficiently strong wind were blowing from the right direction. Haig had suggested that the date of the attack should be made to some extent dependent upon weather conditions, and should take place either on the 24th, the 25th or the 26th, as it was probable that on one at least of the three days the wind would be favourable. But he had been overruled, and it was definitely decided that, whether gas could be used or not, the 25th was to be the day.

## LOOS

"September 25th, 1915. Battle of Loos. An anxious night wondering all the time what the wind would be in the morning. The greatest battle in the world's history begins today. Some 800,000 French and British troops will actually attack today.

"At 2 a.m. General Butler came to my bedroom and reported Mr. Gold<sup>1</sup> was waiting for a telegram from the War Office before making a forecast. Wind had fallen.

"At 3 a.m. I saw Mr. Gold. Wind in places had fallen to one mile per hour. He could not say anything definitely beyond that 'the wind would probably be stronger just after sunrise (5.30) than later in the day'. The Indian Corps required  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours notice, as they had a mine to explode. I therefore fixed zero for 5.30 a.m., which would mean the main attack going in 6.30 a.m.

"I went out at 5 a.m. Almost a calm. Alan Fletcher lit a cigarette and the smoke drifted in puffs towards the N.E. Staff Officers of Corps were ordered to stand by in case it were necessary to counter-order attack. At one time, owing to the calm, I feared the gas might simply hang about *our* trenches. However, at 5.15 a.m. I said, 'Carry on.' I went to the top of our wooden look-out tower. The wind came gently from S.W. and by 5.40 had increased slightly. The leaves of the poplar trees gently rustled. This seemed satisfactory. But what a risk I had run of gas blowing back upon our own dense masses of troops."

When he had given those orders, and with those two words "carry on" had shouldered the vast responsibility of launching for the first time in British history a gas attack on an extensive front with a faint and variable wind behind it, there was nothing left for Haig to do but to await, with such patience as he could command, the reports that would

<sup>1</sup> Major Gold was a meteorological expert and head of the Meteorological Branch R.E.

## LOOS

dribble in from the gas masked Infantry who were climbing out of their trenches in the grey dawn to follow the yellow clouds of poison that the breeze bore all too slowly towards the enemy.

The First Army at this time consisted of four Corps—the I, the III, the IV and the Indian Corps. The I was commanded by Gough, the III by Pulteney, the IV by Rawlinson, and Sir Charles Anderson had recently succeeded Sir J. Willcocks in the command of the Indian Corps. From north to south the Corps were arranged in the following order, first the III Corps, then the Indians, then the I Corps with the IV Corps on the extreme right. On the northern flank lay the Second Army and on the southern the French Tenth Army. The attack was to be carried out by the I and IV Corps on a frontage of about four miles from Haisnes in the north to Loos in the south. No limit was fixed to the distance that they should advance. They were ordered to “push on eastwards in the direction of Pont à Vendin to the extreme limit of their power”. They would leave the town of Lens on their right, which owing to the advance of the French farther down would ultimately be cut off, and which the enemy would therefore be obliged to abandon.

The first stages of the attack were remarkably successful. The IV Corps advancing at 6.30, forty minutes after the release of the gas, some of them dribbling a football in front of them, others inspired by the sound of the bagpipes, either found the enemy's trenches deserted when they reached them, or else had little difficulty in overcoming all opposition. When they reached the village of Loos the enemy were taken completely by surprise and either hid in the cellars or took to flight.

Only on the extreme left of the IV Corps' front were serious difficulties encountered. A capricious breeze blew



## LOOS

some of their own gas back into the British trenches before the attack began and caused a large number of casualties. There was also some loss of direction, and the opposition put up by the enemy was far more obstinate here than anywhere else, with the result that the advance, which did eventually take place, was considerably delayed.

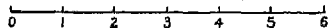
The I Corps, attacking simultaneously with the IV, were also unfortunate with their gas, and they also were less successful with their left wing, the 2nd Division, than elsewhere. Nevertheless, they accomplished a great deal, and in the centre especially their advance was extremely rapid despite the serious obstacles that opposed it.

"The initial success of the 25th September", says the Official Historian, "was ample demonstration that the plans of the Commander of the First Army were not altogether founded on false hopes." No doubt existed as to why more was not accomplished. Each Corps had been directed to attack with their full force, setting no limit to their efforts, retaining no troops as a reserve. The result was naturally that when their first splendid burst of energy was exhausted, and they paused breathless with their numbers terribly depleted by casualties, they looked round expectantly for the fresh troops which should be coming up to support them and which, forming the second wave of the victorious incoming tide, should sweep away the already battered and partly demoralised enemy. But those fresh troops did not appear until it was too late, and the reason for their absence was that the warnings of Haig had been disregarded.

We have seen how he had from the first insisted upon the importance of having the Reserves close up and easily available, and how he had wished that they should be put under his command, he being, in fact, in charge of the battle. It was about 7 a.m. when the first news reached him

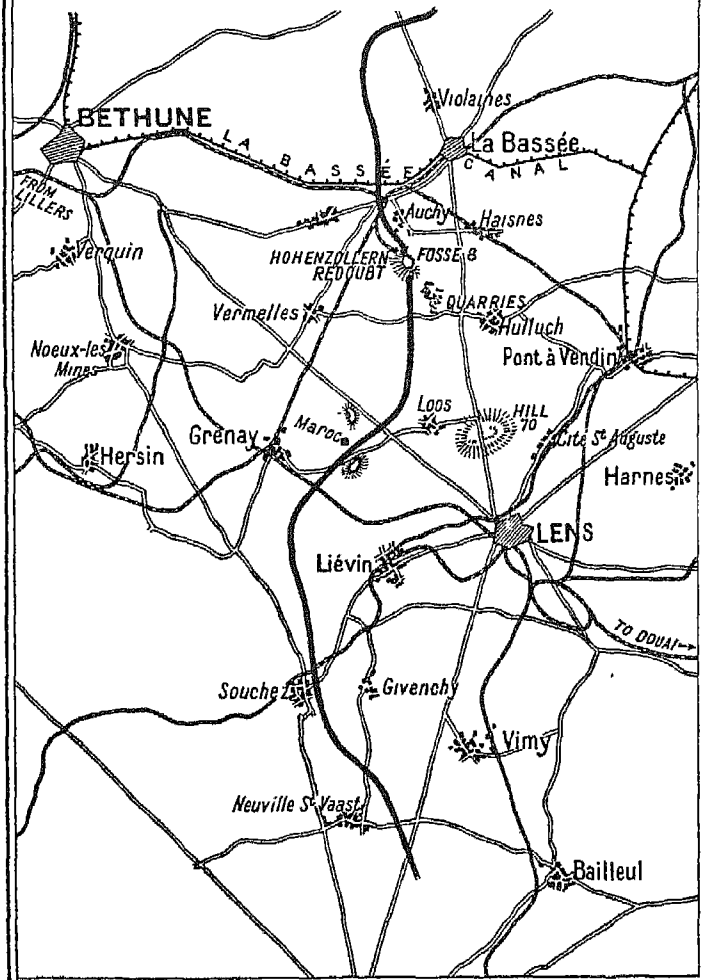
# LOOS

Scale of Miles



Main Roads ——— Main Railways ———

Approximate German front line at commencement of battle.....





## LOOS

of the successful advance of his two Corps. He immediately despatched a messenger to French "urging the necessity for having Haking's Corps ready to advance at once in pursuit".

At 8.45 an officer arrived from the Commander-in-Chief with his congratulations. "I sent him back at once to tell Sir John that the Reserve Brigades of the I and IV Corps had already reached the German trenches, and to beg him to place Haking's Corps under my orders. *Reserves must be pushed on at once.*"

But still no action was taken to grant this urgent request, and about 11.30 French himself arrived at Haig's headquarters, and only then said that he would put two of Haking's three Divisions under Haig's orders. The two that were selected were the 21st and 24th, which had only recently arrived in France and had had no experience of warfare. That which French retained under his own command was the Guards Division. It was not until 2 p.m. that Haig heard definitely from Haking and was able to give him orders. He then directed him to advance immediately "between Hulluch and Cité St. Auguste and occupy the high ground between Pont à Vendin and Harnes, with the crossings over the canal to the east and south of that line".

Further delay unfortunately took place before these orders were transmitted from Corps Headquarters to the Brigades concerned, with the result that after a long march, and without a meal, both the 21st and the 24th Divisions were overtaken by darkness before they reached the battlefield, and were unable to take any part in the fighting that day.

The results of the following day were less satisfactory. In the night the Germans, who had brought up their reinforcements, counter-attacked in force and succeeded in re-occupying some of the positions they had lost. The per-

## LOOS

formance of the 21st and 24th Divisions, coming under fire for the first time after a long night march and losing early in the day one or two of their senior Officers, including a Brigadier General, was disappointing. The earlier reports received at Army Headquarters on the previous day had emphasised the successes and minimised the casualties.

When French came to visit Haig on the morning of the 27th he was shown "how long it had taken for the Reserves to come up, even with the greatest energy on the part of everyone concerned". It is not recorded that he made any comment. Haig himself was clear in his own mind that the lack of success was "solely on account of the initial mistake of the C.-in-C. in refusing to move up the Reserve Divisions close to the rear of the attacking troops before the commencement of the operations".

On the 28th he decided to press the attack no farther, but to consolidate the positions that had already been gained. It was arranged that the 21st and 24th Divisions should be withdrawn for further training. Haig felt that a great opportunity had been lost and that it was entirely due to French's refusal to follow the advice, which his own knowledge of military science ought to have supported. The positions in rear of the German front line which would have fallen easily before a determined attack a few days before were now strongly defended. "Unfortunately", he wrote, "the enemy has had time to construct defences at Pont à Vendin. It was quite undefended last Saturday and the enemy had no troops in his second line. It is thus certain, that even with *one* Division in reserve and close up, as I had requested, we could have walked right through his second line! And all our present preparations would have been unnecessary. When the C.-in-C. remains blind to the lessons of war in this important matter (handling of Reserves) we hardly deserve to win."

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The bitterness with which he wrote is not surprising. "Sir John French at his interview with me today" (September 28th) "... seemed tired of the war, and said that in his opinion we ought to take the first opportunity of concluding peace, otherwise England would be ruined. I could not agree but said we cannot make peace till the German military power is beaten."

On the 29th he wrote to Kitchener:

*"Personal and Private*

Hinges,

Wed. 29th Sept. 1915.

"My dear Lord Kitchener,

"You will doubtless recollect how earnestly I pressed you to ensure an adequate reserve being close in rear of my attacking Divisions, and under my orders. It may interest you to know what happened. No reserve was placed under me. My attack, as has been reported, was a complete success. The enemy had no troops in his second line which some of my plucky fellows reached and entered without opposition. Prisoners state that the enemy was so hard put to it for troops to stem our advance that the Officers' servants, fatigue men, etc. in Lens were pushed forward to hold their 2nd line to the East of Loos and Hill 70.

"The two Reserve Divisions (under C.-in-C.'s orders) were directed to join me as soon as the success of the First Army was known at G.H.Q. They came on as quick as they could, poor fellows, but only crossed our old trench line with their heads at 6 p.m. We had captured Loos 12 hours previously, and Reserves should have been at hand *then*. This, you will remember, I requested should be arranged by G.H.Q. and Robertson quite concurred in my views and wished to put the Reserve Divisions under me but was not allowed.

## LOOS

"The final result is that the enemy has been allowed time in which to bring up troops and to strengthen his second line, and *probably* to construct a third line in the direction in which we are heading, viz. Pont à Vendin.

"I have now been given some fresh Divisions, and am busy planning an attack to break the enemy's second line. But the element of surprise has gone, and our task will be a difficult one.

"I think it right that you should know how the lessons which have been learnt in the war at such cost have been neglected. We *were* in a position to make this the turning point in the war, and I still hope we may do so, but naturally I feel annoyed at the lost opportunity.

"We were all very pleased to receive your kind telegram, and I am,

Yours very truly,  
D. Haig."

Desultory fighting continued for many days after the main engagement. The enemy launched counter-attacks to recover their lost ground, and on October 13th the IV Corps and the XI Corps (the latter commanded by General Haking and now forming part of the First Army) took part in an important offensive in order to recapture the position known as the Quarries and Fosse 8 which had been taken in the early hours of the battle, but had subsequently been lost. This offensive met with considerable but not complete success.

The Battle of Loos, however, was really over by the end of the month and the result of it was tantalisingly inconclusive. On the one hand it could be pointed out that after the sacrifice of more than 40,000 British casualties the Allies were no nearer victory than they had been before. On the other hand it could be argued that over 8000 yards

## LOOS

of the German front line had been captured, that British Infantry had in some places advanced to a distance of two miles, and that strong points which had been fortified at leisure with all the skill and ingenuity of the most accomplished German engineers had fallen before them. This surely proved that the front was not impregnable and that given good luck (a better wind, for instance, for the gas), and good management (having the Reserves, for instance, in the right place at the right time), it would be possible to smash the line and secure a crushing and decisive victory.

It has been seen, and it has been regretted, that since the beginning of the war relations between French and Haig had not been based upon that spirit of complete mutual confidence which should exist between Commander-in-Chief and subordinate, and which had existed between them in the South African War with such happy and glorious results. The question of the Reserves at Loos brought matters to a head. It was a matter of common knowledge. The whole Army in France was discussing it and the discussion spread to the civilians at home.

Colonel Repington, that doughty warrior, whom Haig had refused to meet a few months before, lunching at Prince's Grill, met an officer just home from France who "was very interesting. Admitted that the whole attack had been a failure, and laid the blame on Douglas Haig," who "had become dreadfully aged". The same writer adds on the next page "the ignorance of the people concerning the war is unbelievable."

On October 9th Lord Haldane arrived for luncheon and afterwards asked Haig to give him his views on the question of the Reserves. "He said that feelings were so strong on the subject in England that he had come to France to help in arriving at the truth. I gave him all the facts. The main



## LOOS

criticism to my mind is that the Reserves were not at hand when wanted. The causes for this seem to me to be:

(1) Neither the C.-in-C. nor his Staff fully realised at the beginning (in spite of my letters and remarks) the necessity for Reserves being close up before the action began.

(2) The two Divisions were billeted in depth a long distance from where they would be wanted, and no attempt was made to concentrate them before the battle began.

(3) When the course of the fight showed that Reserves were wanted at once to exploit the victory, the two Divisions were hurried forward without full consideration for their food etc., with the result that the troops arrived worn out at the point of attack and unfit for battle.

(4) But the 21st and 24th Divisions, having only recently arrived in France, with Staffs and Commanders inexperienced in war, should not have been employed for this work. It was courting disaster to employ them at once in fighting of this nature. There were other Divisions available, as shown by the fact that they arrived three days later upon the battlefield, namely the 28th Division, the 12th Division and the Guards Division.

"I also felt it my duty to tell Lord Haldane that the arrangements for the Supreme Command during the battle were not satisfactory. Sir John French was at Philomel (near Lillers) 25 miles nearly from his C.G.S. who was at St. Omer with G.H.Q. Many of us felt that if these conditions continued, it would be difficult ever to win. Lord Haldane said he was very glad to have had this talk with me, and seemed much impressed with the serious opinion which I had expressed to him."

A week later Haig had an important interview with Robertson, who had recently returned from London, where he had been requested in the highest quarters to give

## LOOS

his frank opinion with regard to the competence of the Commander-in-Chief. Both officers were in difficult positions. The problem of divided and opposing loyalties must puzzle the brain of the most subtle of moralists. Robertson was French's Chief of Staff, the post which Haig had filled in South Africa, and both were bound to him by all the obligations of faithful duty which a soldier feels for his superior officer. But they were something more than mere subordinates. They occupied high positions of great responsibility, and when in an hour of danger the Government of their country demanded their advice as military experts on a military matter—the competence of an officer—they would surely have been guilty of a grave dereliction of duty had they allowed any considerations to prevent them from speaking the truth.

Robertson had hesitated to make a definite pronouncement when he was in London as he wished first to find out whether his opinion was shared by Haig. He had therefore come to consult him.

"I told him at once that up to date I had been most loyal to French and did my best to stop all criticism of him or his methods. Now at last, in view of what had happened in the recent battle over the Reserves, and in view of the seriousness of the general military situation, I had come to the conclusion that it was not fair to the Empire to retain French in command on this, the main battle front. Moreover, none of my officers commanding Corps had a high opinion of Sir John's military ability or military views; *in fact, they had no confidence in him*. Robertson quite agreed, and left me saying he knew how to act. . . . He also told me that the members of the Cabinet, who up to the present had been opposed to removing French, had come round to the other opinion."

Meanwhile French sent home his own account of the

## LOOS

Battle of Loos and on November 2nd his despatch appeared in *The Times*. This document contained two statements to which Haig felt it his duty to take exception. Writing of September 25th the Field Marshal stated, "At 9.30 a.m. I placed the 21st and 24th Divisions at the disposal of the G.O.C. First Army who at once ordered the G.O.C. XI. Corps to move them up in support of the attacking troops." And further on it was stated that "at 6 p.m. the Guards Division arrived at Noeux-les-Mines, and on the morning of the 26th I placed them at the disposal of the G.O.C. First Army".

Haig immediately wrote to G.H.Q. pointing out that neither statement was correct. As has already been seen, he did not get into touch with the Commander of the 21st and 24th Divisions until 2.30 p.m. on the 25th, and he did not receive the message informing him that the Guards Division was under his command until 4.15 p.m. on the following day. Copies of telegrams and orders had of course been kept, which Haig enclosed with his message to G.H.Q. and which substantiated his statement beyond the possibility of argument. He therefore requested that these mistakes in the despatch might be corrected.

The reply from G.H.Q. was to the effect that "the statements in question were substantially correct and called for no amendment". Haig felt obliged to return to the charge, pointing out that the despatch conveyed the impression "that at 9.30 a.m. on the 25th September I was able to use the 21st and 24th Divisions in support of the attacking troops, and similarly that I could make use of the Guards Division on the *morning* of the 26th—this was not the case and I beg to request that this fact may be placed on record."

Here the correspondence seems to end. More important matters connected with the future rather than the past were

engrossing the attention of those concerned in it. Kitchener was visiting the Near East in order to report on the position in the Dardanelles and at Salonica. Many believed and some hoped that he would not return to the War Office. Haig had a soldier's distaste for politics and had struggled, hitherto successfully, against becoming involved in them. But as his position increased in importance and his prestige developed, his opinion was naturally sought by those who were anxious for guidance and he could not withhold it. His old friend, Lord Esher, who exercised more influence behind the scenes than anyone, visited him in November and discussed the situation. Haig felt strongly the lack of an organised direction of war policy. The Imperial General Staff which Haldane and he had built up had practically ceased to function. He believed that new life could be put into it by transferring Robertson from France to London. He knew that all the eloquence of all the politicians in England could not shift Robertson one inch. If Kitchener had to go, which now seemed probable, let him be made Viceroy of India. Haig was strongly opposed to the proposal to make Kitchener Commander-in-Chief in the Near East, "because wherever he is, by his masterful action he will give that sphere of the operations an undue prominence in the strategical picture". Lord Esher undertook to support Haig's views in London.

He no doubt did so with considerable effect, for when Haig himself went on leave a few days later he found that Robertson's appointment had been practically settled. He discussed the matter with the Prime Minister with whom he had luncheon on November 23rd. "The Prime Minister", he wrote in his diary, "agreed and added that General Robertson had been of great assistance to him. The matters we discussed were of such vital interest to the Empire that I never alluded to my own affairs and the differences which

## LOOS

I had had with Sir John French over the despatch he published 2nd November."

The incident had now no longer any save historical interest for, during Kitchener's absence in the East, Mr. Asquith himself had taken charge of the War Office, and while there he had come to an important decision. He had been a good friend to French so long as he felt that he could trust him, but with characteristic integrity the moment his Commander-in-Chief lost his confidence he decided to replace him. "Asquith", according to his biographers, "seldom laid stress on his own part in any transaction, but he repeated more than once that the substitution of Haig for French was entirely his own act, uninfluenced by any outside pressure."<sup>1</sup>

It was Robertson who first told Haig of the decision to remove French on November 25th. Haig left the same day for Wales to visit his family who were staying with Lady Haig's sister, Miss Vivian, near Bangor. When he returned he had several interviews with Kitchener at the War Office, and at his request drew up a lengthy memorandum on the defence of Egypt. In all these conversations it was assumed that he was to become Commander-in-Chief, but he returned to France on December 4th without any official notification of his appointment. Before he left, Kitchener impressed upon him the importance of keeping on good terms with the French, and said that Joffre should be looked on as the Commander-in-Chief in France.

The first definite information that reached him with regard to his promotion came, curiously enough, from his old friend Mr. Leopold de Rothschild, who was a regular correspondent. On December 7th he wrote from London that "all had been satisfactorily arranged".

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, by J. H. Spender and Cyril Asquith, Vol. II, page 191.

12 Johning Street  
Whitehall SW1

Secret

8 Dec 1915

My dear Sir Douglas,

Sir J. French

has placed in my  
hands his resignation  
of the Office of Commander-  
in-Chief of the Forces in  
France

Subject to the King's

pleasure, I have the  
pleasure of proposing to you  
that you should be his  
Successor

I am satisfied that there  
is the best chance that  
could be made in the interests  
of the Army & the Country

I ought to add, in  
the strictest confidence,

FACSIMILE OF MR. ASQUITH'S LETTER TO SIR DOUGLAS  
HAIG OFFERING HIM THE POST OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
OF THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE



that it is probable that Sir  
W. Roberts... may be summoned  
home to take up a  
position here, and that the  
difficult question being thus  
before him to the front of  
reflecting him as Chief of  
the Staff in France

I should be glad to know  
what would be your view,  
Sir, that case?

For the moment all  
these changes ought to  
be kept private.

Believe me

Yours very sincerely

W. H. Asquith

Genl

Sir D. Haig G.C.B.

24

FACSIMILE OF MR. ASQUITH'S LETTER TO SIR DOUGLAS  
HAIG OFFERING HIM THE POST OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
OF THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE





## LOOS

The Prime Minister wrote on the following day:

*"Secret.*

8 Dec. 1915.

"My dear Sir Douglas,

"Sir J. French has placed in my hands his resignation of the office of Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in France.

"Subject to the King's approval I have the pleasure of proposing to you that you should be his successor.

"I am satisfied that this is the best choice that could be made in the interest of the Army and the Country.

"I ought to add, in the strictest confidence, that it is probable that Sir W. Robertson may be summoned home to take up a position here, and that the difficult question may therefore have to be faced of replacing him as Chief of the Staff in France.

"I should be glad to know what would be your views in that event.

"For the moment all these changes ought to be kept private.

Believe me,

Yours very sincerely,

(Sd.) H. H. Asquith."

"I wrote at once accepting the appointment," is Haig's only comment. Several days passed before he received any official notification, but he concluded from the telegrams of congratulation that reached him on December 16th that an announcement had been made, and the following morning he read it in a day-old newspaper.

He saw French once only before taking over the command on December 19th. The interview was cold and formal, nothing was mentioned save matters of military routine. So they parted. The words which Johnson wrote of Steele and Addison are not inappropriate.

## LOOS

“Every reader must surely regret that these two illustrious friends after so many years passed in confidence and endearment, in unity of interest, conformity of opinion and fellowship of study, should finally part in acrimonious opposition. Why should not faction find other advocates? But among the uncertainties of this human state we are doomed to remember the instability of friendship.”

## Chapter XIII

### COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

On Sunday, the 19th of December, 1915, Haig wrote in his diary—"Fine, clear, frosty morning. At 12 noon I assumed the Chief Command of the British Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders." He did not feel impelled to add anything in the way of commentary to that brief statement. Never before in the history of Great Britain had a soldier been promoted to such a vast command. Less than eighteen months earlier he had been deeply conscious of the great responsibility that rested upon him as the Commander of a single Corps. Now he had under his command three Armies, which were shortly to be increased to five, with four Corps in each. He had always believed in victory, but he had never been a light-hearted optimist, nor dismissed the possibility of defeat. He knew that upon his conduct now depended the future of the Empire that he had served all his life. And in this period of supreme trial, which was to prove longer than all expectation, he was supported from first to last by his deep religious belief.

The faith in which he had been brought up, and which had hitherto played no great part in a full and fortunate existence, now entered into the very fibre of his being and remained with him to the end. The twentieth century is generally considered an age of agnosticism, nor are soldiers usually accounted the most religious of men, yet piety

## COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

appears to have been an outstanding characteristic of the most successful Commanders on the Western Front. A little later, when the French were considering the appointment of a new Commander-in-Chief, Lord Bertie wrote to Haig from Paris, "Foch is objected to because he has a Jesuit brother, Pétain because he was brought up by the Dominicans, and Castelnau still more because he goes to Mass."

Though naturally reticent, Haig did not hesitate, on occasion, either to write or to speak of these solemn matters. He had visited General Gough while the fighting round Loos was still in progress, and had found him "rather downhearted for him", owing to the failure of a certain Division to carry out his orders. "I reminded Gough", he writes, "that we shall win 'Not by might, nor by power, but by *my spirit*, saith the Lord of hosts'."

On Christmas Day he was much impressed by a sermon delivered by the Bishop of Khartoum (the Right Rev. L. H. Gwynne), which he caused to be printed and circulated to the troops, and henceforward he rarely missed attendance at Divine Service on Sunday, and seldom failed to note in his diary the text of the sermon, of which he frequently wrote down a brief account.

On the 2nd of January he attended the Scottish Church which was to be his regular place of worship for the rest of the war. "Service was held in a school up a stair. A most earnest young Scotsman, George Duncan, conducted the service. He told us that in our prayers we should be as natural as possible and tell the Almighty exactly what we feel we want. The nation is now learning to pray, and nothing can withstand the prayers of a great united people. The congregation was greatly impressed, and one could have heard a pin drop during the service. So different to the coughing and restlessness which goes on in church during peace time."

## COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

And on the following Sunday, "I attended the Scottish Church at 9.30 a.m. The clergyman (George Duncan) is most earnest and impressive. Quite after the old covenanting style. 'Whatever your work is,' he said, 'do it well, and have God always with you.' He was well aware of the difficulties of praying in the Barrack Room, etc.; that was not essential, but constant communing with God for a regular period was necessary every day—when walking or when doing work. Such a habit gives one added strength. Pray without ceasing."

So far as the military problems that faced him were concerned, he doubtless felt himself as well qualified to cope with them as any officer in the British Army. None had studied his profession more closely, none was more firmly grounded in military science, none had more experience of practical warfare. But in the position that he now occupied, military knowledge alone was not enough. It was not only with the enemy that he had to deal, but also with the Allies and with the civil power.

There are possibly no two races that experience greater difficulty in understanding one another than the English and the French. No few miles of salt water in the world have exercised so estranging an influence as the Straits of Dover. There is no natural antipathy between the races, nor did all the centuries of warfare ever breed a spirit of hatred; there is only a complete failure of mutual comprehension. They approach every problem from a different standpoint, and if they arrive at the same conclusion, they reach it by different roads. And perhaps the key to the enigma lies in the fact that the one quality they have in common is a deep-seated arrogance, which is too confident to breed boasting, but which at the bottom of the hearts of the inhabitants of both these countries assures them that they are superior to any other people on the earth. Hence

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they will make no effort to understand foreigners from whom they can have nothing to learn, and the Englishman can never be persuaded that there is not something slightly comic about a Frenchman, and the Frenchman remains convinced that the average Englishman is a fool.

In the military sphere, these difficulties, far from being diminished, are increased. The British officer is certainly not broader minded than his fellow countrymen, and so strong are the traditions of the service that he does experience a real difficulty in believing that a pot-bellied little individual wearing, perhaps, pince-nez, obviously caring nothing for the cut of his uniform, indifferent to athletics and uninterested in sport, can be a fine soldier and a leader of men. Equally to the French the importance that the English attach to smartness of appearance, to proficiency in horsemanship and even in games, to precision of drill, to scrupulous cleanliness of uniform and equipment seem strange idiosyncrasies which have little or nothing to do with military efficiency.

Haig was a man of his race and of his class. He had spent brief sojourns in France and had acquired some fluency in the French language, but he did not easily make friends, even among his own compatriots, and he never succeeded, as Henry Wilson did, in even approaching intimate relations with a Frenchman. Had his character been cast in a more cosmopolitan mould, had he been more hail fellow well met with all and sundry, many difficulties which arose might have been avoided; but in that case he would not have been Douglas Haig, and many difficulties which were avoided might have arisen.

As has been seen, he had appreciated long before the war the difficulties that were to be expected in dealing with an Ally, and that would be increased if the war were being carried on in that Ally's territory. The fact that the Ally,

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owing to his superior numbers, was the senior partner in the alliance did not render the position any easier. Haig's instructions, which he received soon after taking over the supreme command, differed slightly from those of his predecessor in this respect. French had been told "to coincide most sympathetically with the plans and wishes of our Ally". Haig was informed that "the closest co-operation between the French and British as a united army must be the governing policy". French had been assured that "You will in no case come in any sense under the orders of any Allied general"—but in Haig's instructions the assurance had been qualified: "You will in no case come under the orders of any Allied General further than the necessary co-operation with our Allies above referred to."

Haig's first interview with Joffre, after assuming the command, took place at Chantilly on December 23rd, when they had an informal discussion of the situation. "General Joffre", he wrote, "was quite hopeful, said his armies would have unlimited ammunition in the spring, and he expected to drive the enemy back by April. I had intended to spend only half an hour, because he lunched at 11 a.m. I found it was 11.30 when I rose to go. The old man was evidently very much pleased with my visit, and came and saw me into my car at the entrance to the garden. He shook me by the hand most warmly twice, and held it so long that I thought I was never to be allowed to go. Altogether it was a very satisfactory interview."

In the following week, on the 29th, a more important meeting took place at Chantilly. The President of the Republic was there together with Monsieur Briand, the Prime Minister and General Galliéni, the Minister for War, "the latter in plain clothes, I suppose to match the civilian Ministers, and looking like an old rag and bone man, gaunt and thin."



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The meeting went off well. The military leaders were in complete accord and reported themselves satisfied with the situation of their armies. One of the French Generals complained of the inefficacy of the French gas masks, and Haig offered to supply them with ten thousand English masks a day while they were experimenting with a new model. The discussion was followed by a most cordial luncheon. Haig found Briand "a most charming man and most alert. He said that if the present good feeling had existed between us from the commencement the situation would now be very different. But it was too late.

"Time went on and, while I was talking to some of the Generals, I noticed a little discussion going on amongst the Ministers in a corner, and suddenly M. Poincaré advanced to me in the most charming way and said that he had much pleasure in promoting me in the Legion of Honour to the grade of 'Grand Cordon', and that from henceforth I must wear my 'plaque' on the *left* side.

"Then the Ministers departed. The soldiers then had a little discussion with General Joffre. I found Gen. de Langle de Carey an exceptionally gentlemanly man, and a fine soldier. He certainly has 'la flamme'. Foch is a 'méridional' and a great talker. He was much chaffed about his book, *Principes de la Guerre*."

General Huguot, who had hitherto been head of the French mission at British G.H.Q., was replaced at the end of the year by Colonel des Vallières who took over his new position on January 1st. Haig sent for him the same morning. "I told him that when I am at my Headquarters I see all my head Staff Officers at 9.30 a.m. daily, and I hoped he would attend also. He was much pleased. I am quite impressed with him. So quiet and silent for a Frenchman—and such a retiring gentlemanly man. Yet he has seen much and read much. He was Professor of Infantry Tactics at the

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French Staff College before the war, and recently commanded an Infantry Brigade in the attack in September in Champagne.

"I showed him the instructions which I had received from the Secretary of State for War containing the orders of the Government to me. I pointed out that I am *not under* General Joffre's orders, but that would make no difference, as my intention was to do my utmost to carry out General Joffre's wishes on strategical matters, as if they were orders! I explained my views as to the tactics which should be adopted in the future, with a view to defeating the enemy. He agreed, and seemed much pleased with my being so frank and straightforward in my dealings with him."

Haig felt justified in reporting to Kitchener, to whom he wrote the same day, wishing him a happy New Year, that "As directed by you, I have done my best to start on friendly terms with the French. I think I have made a good beginning."

Nor was it only to the Secretary of State for War that he wrote so cheerfully of his first experience of co-operation with the French. Referring to the interview at Chantilly, he wrote to Mr. Leopold de Rothschild, "I thought that the meeting was good for the Generals as well as for the Government. Generals after a certain time of life, especially French, are apt to be narrow-minded and disinclined to take advantage of modern scientific discoveries. The civilian Minister can do good by pressing the possibility of some modern discovery. I found all at Chantilly most friendly, and I feel sure that our relations with the French G.H.Q. will run quite smoothly."

This quotation from a confidential letter to an old friend displays a breadth of mind which many ignorant writers have failed to find in Haig's mental equipment. It is doubtful whether anything analogous could be discovered in

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the private correspondence of contemporary politicians, or whether they ever appreciated that they had something to learn from soldiers as this soldier appreciated that he had something to learn from them.

For the other great problem, which presented itself to the Commander-in-Chief and which had not existed for the Army Commander, was connected with the maintenance of friendly and confidential relations between himself and the representatives of the civil power. Here again no immediate difficulties were to be anticipated. Despite his natural suspicion of politicians, Haig had already learned to respect Mr. Asquith—a sentiment which was to be increased by further knowledge. At the War Office he had two soldiers to deal with, and under a new arrangement, which coincided with Robertson's promotion, the importance of the position of Secretary of State had been diminished in favour of that of the C.I.G.S. In that office Robertson was to prove an invaluable link between the Commander-in-Chief and the Cabinet.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the position that Robertson filled, and it is typical of the spirit of paradox that pervades English public life, that such a man should have been called upon to fill it. Here, if ever, there seemed to be an opportunity for the born diplomatist, for the man who had seen something both of military affairs and of the interior of politics, who had mixed in both worlds and could interpret one to the other, and who from long experience had grown tolerant of stupidity and quick to interpret misunderstandings. The man who was selected for this office was one who had risen from the ranks and who knew nothing save what the British Army had been able to teach him. The success with which Sir William Robertson performed this high function is a proof of his remarkable qualities. Clarity of vision and honesty of

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purpose made up for the lack of worldly knowledge and of diplomatic training. It was not the men but the system that was at fault.

And the defects of the system began early to manifest themselves. The British Constitution, which had been developed during centuries of isolation from world conflict, was admirably adapted for periods of peace, but woefully deficient for warfare on a vast scale. From the beginning until the end of the war the difficulty of the Prime Minister was that he had to choose between a slow, simple and costly strategy, bluntly stated by laconic soldiers, and half a dozen different brilliant schemes of swift and devastating effect urged upon him with burning eloquence and absolute sincerity by advocates who possessed every quality except prolonged military training and a lifetime spent in the study of strategic problems.

Robertson soon realised the difficulties of his position. "There is dreadful need of superior control of the war," he wrote to Haig; "I am doing all right on the War Committee, but it is difficult to keep one's temper. At the last meeting Balfour weighed in with a proposal that as the Western Front is so strong we should transfer all possible troops to co-operate with Russia on the Eastern Front! Words failed me, and I lost my temper."

Soldiers and politicians had the same objective. All wanted equally to win the war. But their training had been so different, their minds worked along such different grooves that the language they spoke was hardly the same, and the difficulty that they found in understanding one another was comparable only to the difficulty experienced by men of different races. It is illustrated by the incident just recounted. To Balfour's fine intellect and broad intelligence there could appear no harm in throwing airily on to the table a suggestion which seemed to merit a moment's

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consideration. If it had been torn in pieces he would not have raised an eyebrow in objection, and would have smilingly agreed that there was nothing in it. But Robertson took no intellectual pleasure in the discussion of abstract propositions. His mind was direct, his views were settled and his time was fully occupied. To him the discussion in Cabinet of a futile proposition seemed as wicked as it would to a clergyman to raise a debate on the possibility of immortality in Convocation, or to a city magnate if a director at a board meeting were to question the desirability of accumulating wealth.

Haig experienced the same difficulty as Robertson, but the entries in his diary prove beyond question that whenever he came face to face with one of the black-coated, suspected tribe of politicians, he took the man on his merits and allowed no previous prejudice to influence his view.

It was in this month, January 1916, that Haig first made the acquaintance of Lloyd George, whom he had of course frequently met already. The inability of these two men to understand one another or to work harmoniously together is a melancholy fact which has to be recorded. That it was not due to any narrow prejudice on Haig's part against either politicians or men who were outside the public school tradition is proved by the entry in his diary after the first evening spent with Lloyd George and Bonar Law, who arrived at his headquarters together. "Mr. Bonar Law strikes me as being a straightforward, honourable man . . . Lloyd George seems to be astute and cunning with much energy and push; but I should think shifty and unreliable. He was most anxious to be agreeable and pleasant, and was quite delighted at my having arranged for his two sons to stay and see him. They seem quite nice boys."

Lloyd George's first impression of Haig, on the other hand, was favourable. He informed Lord Riddell after his

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visit to the new G.H.Q. that "things are much more businesslike than in French's time. There is a new spirit. Haig seems very keen on his job and has a fine Staff."<sup>1</sup>

He also wrote a letter of thanks. "I want to thank you so much for the great courtesy which you showed to me during the interesting visit which I paid to your Head Quarters. I was specially touched by the kindness shown to my two boys.

"The visit, if you will permit me to say so, left on my mind a great impression of things being *gripped* in that sphere of operations; and whether we win through or whether we fail, I have a feeling that everything which the assiduity, the care, and the trained thought of a great soldier can accomplish, is being done."

The terms of the letter breathe something more than mere civility, and it is equally to be regretted that Lloyd George's first opinion of Haig should have altered and that Haig's first opinion of Lloyd George should have remained.

An incident which occurred during this visit gave Haig a further opportunity of studying the ways of politicians. It is best recounted in his own words:

"Lloyd George and Bonar Law went off about 9.30 to visit the workshops at Hazebrouck, etc., etc. Winston Churchill (who commands a battalion in the 8th Division) seems to have met them, and reported an incident which happened last night. Sir F. E. Smith, now Attorney General and a member of the Cabinet, appears to have come from Boulogne yesterday *without any pass* and proceeded to stay with Winston. His having gone through the sentry posts without a pass was duly reported to the A.G.'s office, and orders were given to arrest him and bring him to G.H.Q. Smith (who was in a Lieut.-Colonel's uniform) was duly brought back to St. Omer after dinner, and ar-

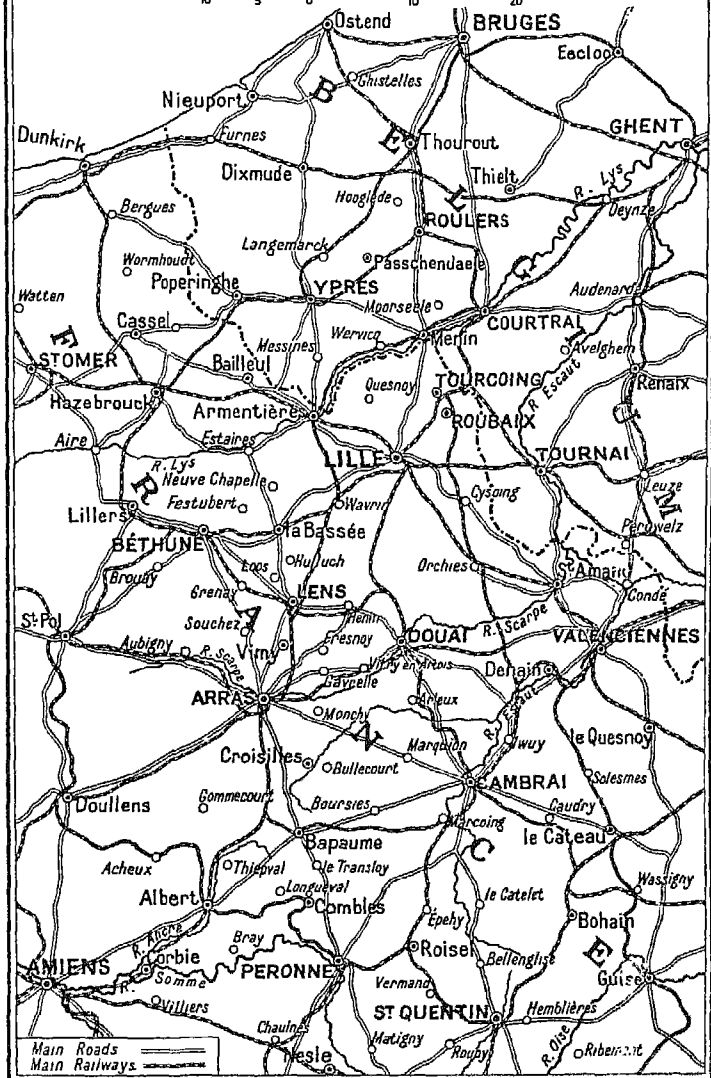
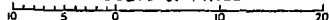
<sup>1</sup> Lord Riddell's War Diary, Vol. I, page 146.

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rived about 2 a.m. and lodged in the Hôtel du Commerce under arrest. He, of course, was much upset, and saw the A.G. this morning, who regretted the manner in which the arrest had been made, but explained that it was his own fault for having come into the area of operations without a pass. Smith then went off to bed. Winston told the story as far as he knew it up to the time of the arrest, with the result that Bonar Law and Lloyd George at once abandoned their visit to Loos and came back here in time for lunch, expecting to find their fellow Cabinet Minister in jail. Bonar Law said that Smith would have to leave the Cabinet if the report were made public, and no explanations or apology given by the Military authorities, and he, Bonar Law, would have to resign also, etc. I said that I had no official knowledge yet of the facts, but that it was by my orders that the Pass System was being now strictly enforced, and that Smith had apparently committed a serious mistake in forcing the sentries. But I gathered that the A.G. had settled the matter. Law was quite pleased at this news, and hoped I would ask Smith to tea, or see him. I at once sent and asked him to lunch. He came and sat on my left. After lunch he, Bonar Law and Lloyd George came to my room by Smith's request. He started a long story to which I listened patiently for three or four minutes, and then asked him what he really wanted. He apologised for having bothered me, and they all agreed it was best to leave the matter as it stood. The A.G. is to send a note to Smith regretting the manner in which the arrest was made. The whole story is to be kept as quiet as possible, and not to be allowed to appear in the press. F. E. Smith seemed most afraid of the ridicule of his friends. The others seemed happy at getting their colleague's release so easily, while I was only too glad to be rid of the lot and be free to get on with my work. However, we all parted friends, and one

# THE WESTERN FRONT

Scale of Miles



Scale 1:24, London





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and all seemed much pleased with what I had done to make their visit pleasant, and smooth over this difficulty.

"I was really astonished at the ease and rapidity with which I had been able to restore calm in a stormy little tea cup, and the A.G. and my Staff in the house wanted to know how I had dealt with them; they all seemed so happy after their interview. I had really said very little, just let them talk one after the other. After going round the Intelligence Section they left for Boulogne, taking F. E. Smith with them."

The entertainment of politicians now became part—neither the least important nor the least onerous part—of Haig's daily duties. His time was full. A large correspondence had to be attended to and conferences, both with the Allies and with his own subordinates, were frequent. One of his first measures was to institute a regular weekly conference with the Army Commanders, which was to take place at each of their headquarters in rotation. These conferences were designed "to develop mutual understanding and closer touch not only between Army Commanders and myself, but also between our Staffs".

Haig had wished to retain General Butler, who had been with him since the death of John Gough, as his Chief of Staff, but in the opinion of the War Office he lacked the necessary seniority. The appointment was therefore given to General Kiggell, Butler remaining as his assistant.

The position of the British Army, when Haig took over the command of it, was as follows. The Second Army, commanded by Plumer, was on the left and held the line from north of Ypres to south of Armentières. The First Army on the Second Army's right went down as far as Loos. Haig had recommended that Rawlinson should command it, but Kitchener had only consented to put Rawlinson in temporary command pending the return of Monro

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from the east, whither he had been sent to report on the situation in the Dardanelles and to advise as to the desirability of evacuation. Kitchener gave as his reason that the Commander of the First Army ought in the natural course of promotion to have the reversion of the Commandership-in-Chief and, should anything happen to Haig, he considered that Monro was better qualified than Rawlinson to succeed him.

On the First Army's right was the French Tenth Army and on the Tenth Army's right lay the English Third Army commanded by Pulteney. Joffre's first request to Haig was that he should relieve a portion of the French Tenth Army by extending the right of the British First Army, which Haig readily consented to do.

The Allies' plan of campaign was to stage a simultaneous offensive on all fronts in the summer. Joffre was anxious that in preparation for this, as it was hoped, decisive operation the British Army should "wear down" the German resistance by a series of local, but powerful, attacks. Haig was ready to play his part in the general offensive, but feared that the so called "wearing-down" operations (*batailles d'usure*) might do more harm than good. It would be impossible to explain to the world what their real purpose was, and failing such explanation it would appear that they had accomplished nothing, and the battles that took place would be reckoned as failures, if not as defeats.

He was also doubtful as to the wisdom of Joffre's selection of the spot where the main blow should be delivered. Joffre had decided that this should be astride the River Somme, that is to say, about the centre of the German line. Haig would have preferred to attack near the sea coast, that is to say, on the German right, in the hope of turning the flank of the enemy.

As usual, however, there existed governing circum-

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stances which prevented the British Commander-in-Chief from exercising a free choice. In the first place there was his obligation to co-operate so far as possible with the wishes of the French. In the second place it was generally stated at this time, and it was not denied by the French, that their man power was almost exhausted and that they would be able to take part in only one more offensive on a grand scale. In the third place there was the already threatening collapse of Russia. Daily the Allies dreaded to learn that the Germans were transferring large bodies of troops to the east with a view to destroying one of their three greatest adversaries and forcing her to a separate peace. Should this intelligence at any moment reach them, the Allies had to be prepared to strike at once.

On January 14th, Major Cavendish from the British Mission at French Headquarters came to report. "He stated that the French view at present seemed to be:

"(1) Russians won't be ready to attack till end of July.

"(2) French, owing to lack of men, can only make one more big offensive, so they are anxious to wait till the Russians can attack.

"(3) The French are now looking to England and Italy to carry on a wearing-out attack until they and the Russians are ready. These attacks should begin early in the spring, say April or May. They can give 7 divisions for one such attack. The rest of the wearing-out attacks will be left to British and Italians. Then, according to French G.H.Q., there should come an interval of about a month before the big attack is launched. For the latter, the French can put in fifty divisions.

"This opinion", Haig goes on to say, "is much the same as I have gathered from Captain Gemeau.

"I think the French man-power situation is serious, as they are not likely to stand another winter's war.

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"There is no doubt to my mind but that the war must be won by the Forces of the British Empire. At the present time I think our action should take the form of

"(1) 'Winter Sports' or raids continued into the spring, i.e., capturing lengths of enemy's trenches at favourable points.

"(2) Wearing-Out fight similar to 1, but on a larger scale at many points along the whole Front. Will last about three weeks to draw in the enemy's reserves.

"(3) Decisive Attacks at several points, object to break through. The amount of ammunition for two and three will be very large indeed."

On January 19th Haig wrote to Kitchener as follows:

"General Headquarters,  
British Army in the Field.

Wednesday,

19th Jan. 16.

"My dear Lord K.,

"I have not replied before to your kind letter of the 14th inst. because I have been hoping to have the pleasure of talking to you here.

"I quite understand the importance of beginning early, and will see to it that operations in proportion to the ammunition available are arranged for. General Joffre spends tomorrow with me, and I shall press your views regarding the important question *of time* upon him.

"I am told that the French are looking to the British and Russians to carry on the preliminary actions or "wearing-out fights" which are designed to attract and exhaust the enemy's Reserves before the main or decisive battles (which are to win the victory) are begun.

"The French Army (except some 6 or 7 divisions) is to be reserved for this last phase.

"As yet I have heard this indirectly, but I have every

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reason for thinking that this is the view of the French G.H.Q. No doubt Joffre will tell me the truth to morrow. The fact is the French "depots" are so empty of troops that their Army is only capable of one big effort in their opinion.

"My view is that the "wearing-out fight" should be carried on simultaneously (or nearly so) from the right of the Russians in the Baltic right round via Italy to our left on the North Sea. And that not until the enemy's Reserves have been drawn into the struggle should we make the blow which is intended to be decisive. I have already put these views to Joffre, and he agrees with the principle.

"Tomorrow I shall urge that the French take their share with us in the wearing-out fight, otherwise it is possible that the Allies get worn out in detail! The losses in this wearing-out fight need not be so great as to impair the efficiency of the French Army in the final decisive battle. Moreover, if the French Army does nothing in the spring its efficiency will deteriorate. I see every reason therefore for *activity* everywhere in the spring, and in any case the Allies must all act in the greatest possible strength simultaneously.

D. H."

On the following day Joffre's visit and conversation confirmed Haig's opinion. "He was most open, told me of the *shortage of men* in France and of the highly unsatisfactory state of munitions. I got the impression that Joffre felt that the French Army could not do much more hard fighting."

The interview was extremely friendly and was followed by the investiture of Haig and other Generals with the Legion of Honour.

"Then we went to Château Philomel (near Lillers) where the 2nd Brigade with a detachment of guns and R.E. was drawn up. General Joffre, after inspecting the troops,

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presented decorations. I received the 'Grand Cordon' and Sir H. Rawlinson and H. Wilson 'Grand Officier' of the Legion of Honour, also ten N.C.O.s and men the 'Croix de Guerre'. The General shouted out 'au nom du President de la République', etc., etc., and then placed the ribbon of the Order round my neck, fixed the plaque to my left breast, and then, before I quite realised what was going to happen, kissed me on both cheeks! I could hardly refrain from laughing. Then Rawlinson's turn came, but he only got the plaque as a Grand Officier, and it was put on his right side. He was duly kissed, and the long Henry Wilson had to bend down for the little fat 'Generalissimo' to perform this part of the ceremony! There were numerous cameras directed on them, so I expect an interesting picture will shortly appear in the picture papers. General Joffre congratulated me, and said what a great honour he felt it was to have been commissioned to give me the 'Grand Cordon'."

The main points with regard to which Haig and Joffre were in agreement and the one question upon which they differed, were set forth at some length in a letter which Haig addressed to his French colleague a few days later.

"I am, as you know, in complete agreement with you as to the need of the maximum strength of all the Allies to be combined during the campaign of 1916 in a great simultaneous effort against the enemy. This effort may take the form of a simultaneous offensive on the Eastern, Western and Italian fronts, to commence as soon as Russia is sufficiently ready—I hope not later than June. Another possibility is that the enemy may make a great attack in spring (probably April or early in May) against Russia, in which case the French, British (and I hope Italian) Forces should be prepared to launch, simultaneously with the German attack on Russia, a general offensive, in the greatest possible

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strength, on their respective fronts. The preparations I have ordered to be made north of the Somme will be available, at need, for such an offensive by the largest Force which I can hope to make available for the purpose in the spring—viz., about 25 divisions.

“On all the above-mentioned points I am in entire agreement with the views expressed in your letter, and I also agree in the desirability of doing all we can to wear down the German strength, and reduce their power of resistance before the general offensive of the Allies is launched.

“On the question of the best methods to adopt for this last-mentioned purpose, however, I fear that our views do not entirely coincide.

“I regard preparatory operations as falling into two different categories, viz.

- (a) those *immediately* preceding our main effort, and
- (b) those not immediately preceding it.

“As regards the former I am of opinion that a few days preceding the general offensive, attacks to capture the enemy's front system of trenches should be delivered. These attacks, which should convey all the appearance of a real effort to break through, should be made at a distance from the points selected for the decisive attacks, with the object of inducing the enemy to engage his Reserves, so that they may not be at his disposal when our real general offensive falls on him. The advantage to be gained by us from these preparatory attacks lies, not so much in the number of the enemy killed or wounded, as in the number of the Reserves that we induce him to employ at a distance from the points at which we intend to force a decision.

“As preparatory operations such as I have described should not be pushed farther than is necessary for the object in view (drawing in and holding the hostile Reserves), the Forces allotted for them need not be organised in great



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depth; but the attacks must be made on a considerable front, as otherwise they would not impose on the enemy.

"The best time to deliver them I estimate to be about 10 to 14 days before the real general offensive begins. That will be long enough to enable us to draw in the enemy's Reserves, but will not give him time to organise others to take their place.

"The 'batailles d'usure' which you ask me to undertake in April, and again (in certain circumstances) in May, would not have the same result, as the Germans would have time to replace losses from their depots and to reorganise and refit their Reserves before the commencement of our general offensive two months or more later. For these reasons I fear that we should reap little, if any, advantage from such 'batailles d'usure' carried out a long time before the commencement of the general offensive. They would undoubtedly entail considerable loss on us with little to show for it; while the results on the morale of the troops, and more especially on public opinion in England, Germany and elsewhere might be unfortunate. The enemy would claim that he had defeated an attempt to 'break through', and as our real object would not be generally understood, his claim would probably be widely accepted. We cannot ignore the possible effect of this on public opinion and on the financial credit of the Allies—a serious consideration. For these reasons I submit that it is most desirable that once fighting begins this year on a large scale it should be carried through as quickly as possible to a decisive issue."

On the day after Haig wrote this letter the head of the French Mission, Colonel des Vallières, came to discuss its contents with him.

His argument was:

"(1) Germans have 25 divisions in reserve behind their

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front in the west, and that no decisive attack can hope to succeed until these are used up. The French have not enough troops to wear out the enemy, and afterwards have men left in sufficient numbers to deliver a strong decisive attack. For this reason General Joffre has decided not to attack with the French Army at all until the German Reserves have disappeared, either by their withdrawal to Russia, or by English attacks! And he let slip the remark 'that at the peace it would never do for France to have no Army at all left'. This is clearly the main reason for wishing us to do preliminary attacks. The French wish to be strong when the terms of peace come to be discussed.

"(2) A fortnight is not long enough for the movement and placing in position of guns which have taken part in the preliminary engagement and are then required in the decisive attacks.

"I pointed out the advantage of a simultaneous attack by all the Allies and the effect of a partial attack (which did not break through) on the morale of the Allied troops, and on the opinion of the people in England, in France and in Germany. The latter would feel they had gained a success by repulsing even a preliminary attack which was not intended to break through. Our credit would also suffer. This is very important, as gold is getting scarce. I held my ground, yet we parted most amicably. I told him I would produce arguments and facts regarding enemy's dispositions to refute all his points. I expected the French would be disappointed at my declining to carry out these preliminary attacks so early, but it is better to let them know now, than to disappoint them at the last moment."

There was further correspondence on this subject and the question was finally settled at a conference which took place at Chantilly on February 14th. Here Haig was com-

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pletely successful, Joffre finally agreeing that the attacks to prepare the way for the great offensive should take place only ten or fifteen days before the main battle.

At the same conference Joffre suggested that the British should take over the whole of the Front then held by the French Tenth Army. Haig stoutly resisted the proposal and after a long, but amicable discussion, he once more gained his point. The following is his own commentary on the day's work.

"Today's was a most important conference. Indeed, the whole position of the British Army in the operations of this year depended on my not giving way on

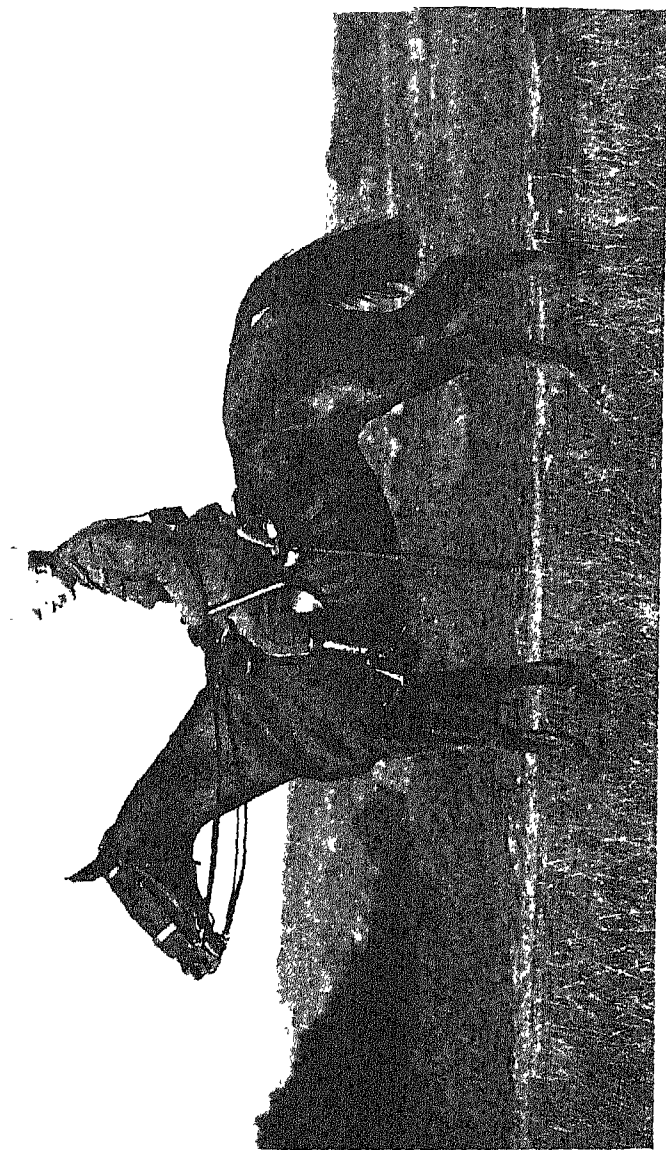
(1) the nature and moment of carrying out the wearing-out fight; and

(2) not using up divisions in relieving the Tenth Army.

"By straightforward dealing, I gained both these points. But I had an anxious and difficult struggle. I had to be firm without being rude in order to gain my points.

"We then went to lunch. I sat on the right of the Generalissimo with General Buat on my right. The latter congratulated me on the way I had been able to argue with the French Generals, and had been so quick at catching them up at every point. This was satisfactory, as it was he who kept the notes on the meeting. Robertson was also most complimentary on my conduct of the discussion. I felt at the conference that I had been given some power not always in me."

But while the Allies were making plans and reaching agreements, the enemy were not idle. A few days later General Castelnau dined at G.H.Q. and Haig was surprised to find him anxious and preoccupied. He raised again the question of the relief of the French Tenth Army and he gave as his excuse for doing so the probability of the Germans launching an attack against Verdun.



THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, TAKEN IN  
FRANCE BY 2ND LIEUT. ERNEST BROOKS

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uncertainties, but on February 27th Haig was able to write in his diary "I telephoned to General Joffre that I had arranged to relieve all his Tenth Army and that I would come to Chantilly tomorrow to shake him by the hand, and to place myself and troops at his disposition."

## Chapter XIV

### BEFORE THE SOMME

It was on the 1st of March that the Fourth Army came officially into existence and Sir Henry Rawlinson was appointed to command it. At the beginning of the war Haig had not felt complete confidence in Rawlinson, who was an intimate friend of Henry Wilson and shared some of his characteristics. He was a brilliant and ready talker, full of ambition and suspected to be not incapable of intrigue. These were all qualities calculated to arouse Haig's distrust, but the more he saw of Rawlinson in the course of the war, the more rapidly did that distrust diminish until it came to be replaced by complete confidence. It is no small tribute to Haig's character and personality that of all those who served under him as Army Commanders during three years, there was not one with whom he ever quarrelled or upon whom he ever ceased to rely. The confidence, as all true confidence must be, was mutual. A year before, when Rawlinson had incurred Sir John French's displeasure, Haig had stood up for him, and Rawlinson commenting on the incident in his diary had written, "It was very good of him and I am certain that I have a staunch ally in his strong character and personality. . . . I feel quite sure that I shall get justice at D.H.'s hands."<sup>1</sup>

In the early days of March the relief of the French Tenth

<sup>1</sup>*The Life of Lord Rawlinson of Trent*, by Sir Frederick Maurice, page 128.

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Army was completed, the British Third Army extending their left northwards to join hands with the right of the First Army which extended to the south. The new Fourth Army came in on the right of the Third Army and the section of the front held by British troops was now continuous from the banks of the Yser to those of the Somme.

During the four months that followed the launching of the great German attack on Verdun it was the duty of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army to watch carefully the progress of that terrific struggle, to prepare to throw the whole weight of his four Armies into the battle when the right moment should arrive, and to keep ever present to his mind the dangerous possibility that he might be compelled by the desperate plight of his ally to take the offensive before his preparations were complete.

As has already been stated, Haig's original desire had been to attack north of the river Lys. That that was the strategically correct spot for the attack he still believed, and he was to remain steadfast in that belief. When this attack was finally delivered in 1917 it was successful in the initial stages, but failed to accomplish its purpose. Conditions would have been far more favourable if it had taken place, as Haig wished, in 1916. The German defences on that section of the front were feebler, few of those concrete "pill boxes", which were to form such formidable obstacles, then existed, and the condition of the ground was better. Haig had also in secret preparation a plan for an advance along the coast from Nieuport to Ostend, which was to be combined with the landing of additional troops and naval support. Such an operation, if successfully conducted, would have turned the flank of the enemy and, in the opinion of those best qualified to judge, such as the Official Historian, might have produced a decisive result in 1916.

Those who have accused Haig of lacking imagination

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are probably ignorant of the various plans and possibilities which were ever occupying his mind, and make no allowance for the necessity, which he was always under, of bowing ultimately to the decision of his French allies.

On March 5th he received a letter from Joffre urging him to make arrangements to attack north of the Somme in order to ease the pressure on Verdun. "In my opinion", he wrote in his diary, "the advisability of making such an attack depends on the time and the position of the French Reserves. By May we shall be able to operate in the area north of the Lys; a comparatively small attack by us north of the Somme, unsupported by a French attack on the south of that river cannot have far-reaching effect. A similar sized attack made towards Roulers would be much more effective from the British point of view. It seems probable (if Joffre's forecast is correct and the Germans mass in force against the French) that there will not be French troops available to attack south of the Somme. In this case, and if we are given time, say till the end of April, then I am in favour of an attack north of the Lys. On the other hand, we might be required to attack in three weeks' time or during April. Having regard to this possibility, I have ordered G.O.C. Fourth Army (Sir H. Rawlinson) to make all arrangements to attack as soon as possible."

On the 12th and 13th of March a somewhat inconclusive conference was held at Chantilly which was attended by military representatives of all the Allies, and was followed by a large luncheon at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris.

Haig returned to St. Omer on the following day, stopping on the way at the headquarters of the Fourth Army in order to impress upon those in authority the lessons which were already to be derived from the fighting before Verdun. "I emphasised the need of the heavy Artillery being



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able to bring an extremely heavy and accurate fire on a selected area, and then to switch off suddenly, when required, on to another area. Also to bring home to units the need for thorough development of the use of the Lewis machine-guns for an offensive. I think units have hardly begun to realise yet the great addition which they have recently received to their fire power by the provision of Lewis machine-guns and machine-gun batteries. Woods were selected as objectives of attack, because the French could not easily put an effective barrage on their far side."

He returned to the same subject at the next weekly meeting of Army Commanders. "After considering the situation in the front of each Army in turn, we discussed the use of Lewis machine-guns in an advance. A few of these guns can develop as great a volume of fire as a considerable number of infantry. They are far less vulnerable and can find cover more easily. I emphasised the necessity for Company and Platoon Commanders being trained in the use of these guns in tactical situations. At present only a comparatively few officers of infantry realise the great addition of fire power which has been given them by the formation of machine-gun companies and Lewis gun detachments."

It has been thought necessary to insert these extracts as the false statement has been made that Haig was slow to learn from experience, and particularly that he underrated the increased importance of the machine gun.

On April 1st General Headquarters were transferred to Château Beaurepaire, a commodious and comfortable house two and a half miles south-east of Montreuil, which was to remain the home of Haig and his immediate Staff for the rest of the war.

Plans for the coming attack went busily forward. On April 5th Haig discussed them with Rawlinson whose Army was to be principally concerned. Writers ignorant of

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military matters and not troubling to inform themselves of the truth have represented the offensives on the Western Front as one straight line clashing hopelessly against another straight line like the flat surfaces of two cymbals meeting together and productive of nothing but noise. Haig's plans were never so void of ingenuity, so lacking in hope of success. It has been seen that he would have preferred to attack in the north where there was a reasonable chance of turning the enemy's flank, but being compelled to attack in the south he sought, so far as possible, to perform a similar operation. A glance at the map will make plain how, owing to a slight salient in their line, he contrived to attack the Germans simultaneously from the west and the south—from the west on a line from Fricourt to Thiepval, and from the south on a line from Fricourt to Montauban.

On the afternoon of April 7th Joffre arrived at Château Beaurepaire in order to discuss plans. "Before tea, I discussed alone with him the proposed operations. There were, I thought, three main points to settle:

"The objective;

"The dividing line between our two forces;

"The timing of our attacks.

"I explained my views but Joffre did not seem capable of seeing beyond the left of the French Army (which the French propose should be at Maricourt), or indeed of realising the effect of the shape of the ground on the operations proposed. He said that I must attack northwards to take Montauban Ridge, while the French troops attacked eastwards from Maricourt. I at once pointed to the heights away to the north-east of Maricourt, and showed that his proposed movement was impossible until the aforesaid heights were either in our possession or closely attacked from the west.

"The old man saw, I think, that he was talking about

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details which he did not really understand, whereas I had been studying this particular problem since last January, and both knew the map and had reconnoitred the ground. The conclusion I arrived at was that Joffre was talking about a tactical operation which he did not understand, and that it was a waste of my time to continue with him. So I took him off to tea. I gather that he signs everything which is put in front of him now and is really past his work, if, indeed, he ever knew anything practical about tactics as distinct from strategy. Joffre was an engineer."

The following week Haig crossed to England in order to acquaint the Government with his intentions and obtain authority to proceed with them. In his first interview with Lord Kitchener and Sir William Robertson he "asked them definitely, did H.M. Government approve of my combining with the French in a general offensive during the summer? They both agreed that all the Cabinet had come to the conclusion that the war could only be ended by fighting, and several were most anxious for a definite victory over German arms, viz., the Secretary for Foreign Affairs (Grey) and the Chancellor of the Exchequer (McKenna)."

On the following day he attended a meeting of a Cabinet Committee where the question of conscription, which was then violently agitating the political atmosphere and threatening the dissolution of the Government, was under discussion. From a military point of view the problem seemed so simple and the solution so obvious that Haig, who could not appreciate the parliamentary difficulties, found it hard to understand why there should be any hesitation in arriving at a decision. "We adjourned", he wrote, "at 1.40, no definite decision having been come to. I felt sad that the inner Cabinet of this great country should be so wanting in decision and public spirit."

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But it was not only the Cabinet whom he found wanting in public spirit during this visit, for when he returned to France on April 17th he found the boat unusually crowded owing to all leave having been stopped between April 18th and the 25th. "This was ordered from home because of the inability of the railways to deal with the Easter traffic as well as with the officers and men coming on leave from the front. . . . I wonder what the future historian will write about Great Britain, whose inhabitants in a period of crisis insist that these holiday-makers should be given preference in travelling to soldiers from the seat of war."

During this same visit he informed the authorities of his desire to make use of the recently invented tanks during the forthcoming battle.

"I saw Colonel Swinton and was told that 150 would be provided by the 31st of July. I said that was too late—50 were urgently required for the 1st June. Swinton is to see what can be done and will also practise and train tanks and crews over obstacles and wire similar to the ground over which the forthcoming attack will be made. I gave him a trench map as a guide, and impressed on him the necessity for thinking over the system of leadership and control of a group of tanks with a view to manoeuvring into a position of readiness during an action."

Soon after his return to France Haig received a message that Clemenceau would like to visit him but, knowing that Clemenceau was a bitter critic of Joffre, Haig preferred to inform the latter before receiving him. He therefore drove over to see Joffre on May 2nd. "The old man was quite delighted to see me. When I made some ordinary remark about the day clearing up he said, 'Il fait toujours beau temps quand vous venez me voir.' " They discussed on this occasion the most important point that still awaited decision, namely, the date of the offensive, and the 1st of

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July was mentioned, which, after many changes, was the date on which it actually took place.

Two days later Haig met Clemenceau. "He is the 'Chef du Comité Militaire du Senat', and in that capacity is visiting the French front. We discussed the whole situation for over an hour. He is evidently well informed of what is going on in most of the theatres of war. His object in coming to see me was to get me to exercise a restraining hand on General Joffre, and prevent any offensive on a large scale from being made until all is ready, and we are at our maximum strength. We cannot expect that Russia will be able to do much towards the defeat of Germany, so we must rely on ourselves (British and French). 'If we attack and fail,' said M. Clemenceau, 'then there will be a number of people in France who will say that the time has arrived to make terms, the French Government would certainly go out and M. Caillaux would be the only alternative to M. Briand.' He is of opinion that there is nothing to be lost by delaying: the French people are in good heart, but if there was a failure, after a big effort, it is difficult to say what the result on their feelings might be. Quick changes are apt to take place in their modes of thought! It is M. Briand and the present Government who are urging Joffre to act soon. I assured him that I had no intention of taking part prematurely in a great battle, but of course I was making ready to attack to support the French in case anything of the nature of a catastrophe were to happen at Verdun. But such a situation seems most unlikely to arise now. My divisions, I told him, want much careful training before we could attack with hope of success. He asked me was I under Joffre's orders? I said certainly not. At the same time, it must be realised that there was only one man responsible for the plans. These Joffre and his Staff worked out for France, and I did my best to co-operate with them;

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but I was responsible for the method of employment of the British forces, so that if anything unfortunate happened I am responsible, and must bear the blame, not Gen. Joffre. Clemenceau assured me that he had only one objective, to serve his country and help the Allies win. He is 75 years old, he told me, but is wonderfully active, and spent two hours in the front trenches today. I found him most interesting, and we parted quite friends, for as the proverb says, 'Friends are discovered, not made.' I suggested that he should see Joffre. But he said the latter would not see him, as he (C) had criticised him (J) in the press."

Clemenceau's fears lest Joffre should precipitate an attack were not unjustified. During the month of May and in the early part of June he was continually impressing upon Haig the vital importance of not postponing the offensive beyond the beginning of July. On the 15th of May and again on the 24th Haig received urgent messages to this effect.

On the 25th Robertson was at G.H.Q. and after dinner they discussed together "whether the British Army should comply with the French Generalissimo's request to attack in the month of July, or wait till August 15th when we would be much stronger. I had gone fully into the various aspects of the question, and what might be the results if we did not support the French. I came to the conclusion that we *must* march to the support of the French. Robertson entirely agreed and took my notes away to study."

The decision of these two soldiers, thus soberly arrived at and briefly chronicled, was to prove of paramount importance in the future history of the war. Politicians frequently referred to our "gallant allies" in their perorations, references that cost them little and that signified nothing. But here were two men who knew the full and fearful implications of their own decision. They were not, like Henry Wilson, enthusiastically Francophil. Robertson found it

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even harder than Haig did to understand foreigners. As their own Army was increasing daily while the Army of France was growing weaker, they might have been tempted to believe that the hour was approaching when they should dictate instead of accepting military policy. Such a temptation must have presented strong attractions to both of them, but they had thought too deeply on the matter to allow personal inclination to overcome profound conviction. The conclusion they had reached was to prove fateful. It is the second guiding principle to which they were both to adhere steadfastly throughout the war. The first was the belief that the war could not be won until the German Army was defeated, which could be accomplished only on the Western Front. The second henceforward was to be that in the last resort British military policy must always conform to the decision of the French High Command.

The next morning Joffre and Castelnau arrived and the four generals discussed the future together. "General Joffre explained the general situation. How the moment was most favourable for the Russians to take the offensive as the Germans and Austrians had both withdrawn troops from Russia. Consequently the Russians intended to attack on the 15th June. The Italians stated that they had suffered considerably and had asked the Allies for help. The French had supported for three months alone the whole weight of the German attacks at Verdun. Their losses had been heavy. By the end of the month they would reach 200,000. If this went on the French Army would be ruined! He therefore was of opinion that the 1st July was the latest date for the combined offensive of the British and French. I said that before fixing the date I would like to indicate the state of preparedness of the British Army on certain dates and compare its condition. I took the 1st and 15th July and

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1st and 15th August. The moment I mentioned 15th August, Joffre at once got very excited and shouted that 'the French Army would cease to exist if we did nothing till then!' The rest of us looked on at this burst of excitement, and then I pointed out that in spite of the 15th August being the most favourable date for the British Army to take action, yet, in view of what he had said regarding the unfortunate condition of the French Army I was prepared to commence operations on the 1st July, or thereabouts. This calmed the old man, but I saw that he had come to the meeting prepared to combat a refusal on my part and was prepared to be very nasty. Castelnau, on the other hand, was most anxious to put Joffre straight. Finally, I asked them, once the date was fixed, not to postpone it at the last moment, as had happened three times last year with Foch. We agreed on having three weeks' notice of the exact date of the attack."

On May 31st a yet more important meeting took place at Dury, two and a half miles south of Amiens. Here Haig met Poincaré, the President of the Republic, Briand, the Prime Minister, General Rocques, the Minister for War, together with Joffre, Foch and Castelnau. The meeting took place in the train in which the Ministers had travelled from Paris.

"General Castelnau read over the Memorandum of which I received a copy last night. I took exception to a paragraph which said the 'British Army had not been attacked', and pointed out that our losses in killed and wounded since December amounted to 83,000—and 653 mines had been sprung during that time. Castelnau explained that the paragraph meant the English had not been attacked like the French at Verdun. The main discussion arose over the necessity for making an attack at an early date. Poincaré said that he had just returned from Verdun,



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where he had seen the senior Generals, Pétain, Nivelle and another general. They told him, 'Verdun sera prise' and that operations must be undertaken without delay to withdraw pressure from that part. He asked my views. I told him that I had visited London in February when fighting at Verdun began, and had got the approval of the Government to make arrangements and support the French in case of necessity. That, on return to France, I had written a letter to C.I.G.S. and got the approval of Government confirmed by letter.

"I had therefore foreseen the possibility of the present situation arising, and was prepared for it. The only question was when *was* the most favourable date for attacking. General Joffre, who alone knew the whole situation fully (at Verdun and in Russia, Italy, etc.) had asked me to be ready by the beginning of July. I had arranged to comply with his request.

"We next discussed the paragraph stating that we must foresee the probability of the French Reserves diminishing. The slow output of French heavy guns was pointed out, and the need for supplying Verdun with everything necessary was recognised, and I said that *in view of the possibility of the British having to attack alone*, it was most desirable to bring to France the divisions which the Allies held at Salonika. I pointed out that *this theatre was the decisive point, and that we ought to have every available division here ready to strike in at the DECISIVE moment*. 'Concentration of effort' could alone lead to decisive success. Briand enlarged on the possibility of the Serbians making a separate peace, if they were not led forward to the attack against the Bulgarians. I said that would be preferable to our lacking the necessary superiority to exploit any success gained here. Beat the Germans here, and we can then make what terms we like. Foch came in for a reprimand from M. Briand because he

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had stated to politicians that he was against the offensive this year. His excuses seemed to be very lame; he ate humble pie. He had evidently spoken very freely to Clemenceau recently."

The opening days of the month of June were marked by the Battle of Jutland and the death of Lord Kitchener. Intelligence of the latter event was conveyed to Haig on his way to England. "On reaching Dover, Military Landing Officer showed me telegram from police stating it was reported that Lord Kitchener on H.M.S. *Hampshire* had been drowned. Ship struck a mine and sank. Sea very rough." He adds no comment, but for him the blow was a severe one, because he had lost not only a friend but an ally. Although Kitchener's importance had been diminished since Robertson became C.I.G.S., he still played a great part in the eyes of the country, and still retained the full confidence of his fellow countrymen. His loyalty both to Robertson and Haig had never wavered, and they both feared that the advent of a civilian to the War Office might increase their difficulties.

Kitchener himself had not been happy in his relations with his Cabinet colleagues. He had known that many of them were anxious to get rid of him, and when he stayed with Haig in February he had spoken very frankly on the subject. "Rightly or wrongly," he said, "the people believe in me. Probably quite wrongly—but in any case it is not me that the politicians are afraid of, but what the people would say if I were to go."

"He told me how the politicians are constantly intriguing against one another and have come to him to join them against Asquith. He has always declined because he feels that Asquith is the best man for Prime Minister, and he has found that Asquith can be trusted, but he does not trust the others."

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The North Sea had now completed the task which Lord Kitchener's colleagues had been afraid to undertake. Kitchener had been effectually got rid of and Asquith was about to take the fateful decision of appointing Lloyd George to take his place.

Friction was being caused at this time between the British and the French Governments owing to the latter's insistence on assuming the offensive at Salonika. The British Government, with the possible exception of Lloyd George, had never supported this expedition with any enthusiasm, and found it difficult now to appreciate the point of view of the French Government who, while clamouring for our speedy assistance on the Western Front, were at the same time embarking on expenditure of men and munitions in the Balkans, for which no immediate need seemed to exist.

On June 7th Haig attended a meeting of the Cabinet. "The situation at Salonika was discussed. General Sarrail seems to have advanced, taking one British division with him. He told our G.O.C. (Milne) that the French Government had ordered him to advance. This was entirely opposed to the agreements entered into between the British and French Governments. It was fully realised that a very serious situation might result; so a telegram was sent to Paris to notify the French Government of what was on at Salonika, and to express the disbelief of the British Government that Sarrail's advance had been officially approved by the French Government. I sat in Lord K's seat next to Mr. Balfour. The latter was most pleasant, as were all the Ministers. At the end of the meeting, the Prime Minister said the Government had complete confidence in me, but would like to ask a few questions. These resolved themselves into the question about the Ypres Salient, and another about the nature of the recent fighting. I easily satisfied

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them as to why it was necessary to hold on to the Salient and the causes of the casualties amongst the Canadians. Incidentally, I reproved Bonar Law for listening to some Canadians who had urged on him the abandonment of the Ypres Salient."

Two days later there was a joint meeting of the Cabinet War Committee with members of the French Government. "Before the meeting opened, a telegram from our Ambassador in Paris (Lord Bertie) was passed round, stating that the French had practically issued an ultimatum over Salonika by stating that, whether the British advanced or not, they intended to do so

"The Prime Minister welcomed M. Briand in an opening address. M. Briand replied. Then our Premier asked if the French were quite in agreement with what the British Armies were doing on the Western Front to help France. Joffre replied saying the Western Front could not be dealt with apart from the other fronts, and then went straight into the whole Salonika question. He displayed some heat, so that the Prime Minister turned off the discussion on to Greece. M. Cambon produced a telegram which was practically an ultimatum to Greece asking for the dismissal of Government, demobilisation of Army, etc. This was quickly approved after some amendment made on the initiative of Mr. Balfour. Notably rejecting proposal to call on King of Greece to dismiss his present Government which is Germanophil. I was surprised at the 'chancy' way business of such far-reaching magnitude was disposed of.

"About 1.15 p.m. we adjourned for lunch. We all lunched at Downing Street, except the Secretaries and lesser lights. I sat between Mr. Balfour and Lord Crewe. About 2.30 M. Briand and party left for Buckingham Palace.

"We (of the British party) then formed ourselves into

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a Committee and discussed the line of action to be adopted after lunch. It was agreed that, although no arguments were likely to influence Briand, still it was very necessary to set out the arguments why the British Government refused to comply with the French in their plan of action.

"At 3.15 p.m. Committee reassembled. Mr. Balfour made a most excellent speech indicating the British point of view. Need for every available man and round of ammunition in France, etc., shortage of shipping, etc. Lord Curzon followed, giving details of the shipping required for an offensive in Balkans. General Robertson came next dealing with sundry military details. Briand and Joffre replied. They had really no arguments. Lloyd George, M. Cambon and Sir E. Grey continued the discussion, and then about 6 p.m. Asquith made a most excellent speech, putting the case clearly to the French. He had been most patient. As the French had tried to make out that the British Government had at one time favoured the Salonika project, Asquith from documents showed that the contrary had been the case. Briand was immovable, so at 6.30 the meeting broke up.

"A few of us stayed to assist in drafting a note to be handed to Briand tonight, showing the main reasons of disagreement by the British. I saw Joffre for a few minutes. I could see that he was upset at the firmness of the British Cabinet, and he told me that if Briand returned to Paris with the negative answer which the British Government had just given, it meant the 'craquement' of M. Briand and his Government! I was confirmed in my opinion that Joffre really disliked the idea of an offensive from Salonika as a military proposition, and agreed solely for political reasons. I remained with the Prime Minister and Hankey, who were drafting the report, and gave them some notes on the nature of the offensive which the British Army in

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France is about to undertake to relieve the pressure on Verdun. It is to be a battle of 'durée prolongée' and Joffre had urged me to be ready to carry out frequent reliefs of the divisions engaged. Sound policy, therefore, required that all our resources in men and ammunition should be sent to the decisive point, viz. France, and not wasted against the Bulgars in the Balkans, or on any other secondary objective."

All this while Haig was continually receiving messages from the French with regard to the seriousness of the situation. Before he left France he had received a letter from Joffre on June 3rd saying that the attacks on Verdun were continuing very fiercely, and that he wished the British infantry to be ready to attack on July 1st, not merely that the artillery bombardment should begin on that date. On June 10th he received a telegram in London to the effect that Castelnau wished him to hasten preparations so that the attack might take place earlier, and suggesting that he should see Joffre, who was then also in London, on the subject.

"I thought it unnecessary to see Joffre because I had spoken to the latter only yesterday afternoon (5.30 p.m.) regarding the situation at Verdun, and he had said nothing as regards altering the date of the attack. I therefore saw General Davidson and told him to telephone to General Kiggell to that effect, and to add that we must hasten our preparations as much as possible; but since our attack had as its objective to draw off German reserves from attacking Verdun, it must be made in full strength, and be continued for some time to produce definite results. A hastily prepared attack without an adequate supply of ammunition must assuredly fail in its object."

Three days later the news became still more alarming. "General des Vallières reported that the situation at Verdun

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is serious. Not only men, but the Generals and Staffs are getting tired out and jumpy. General Joffre is anxious that our infantry attack should be launched on 25th June (Sunday), that would mean that our bombardment should begin on the 20th. I said that of course I would do all in my power to support the French Army, but our attacks even on 25th would be too late to check any vigorous attacks by new enemy troops at Verdun. These must already be in place and ready to attack.

"A letter was accordingly despatched to Joffre stating that we would attack on the date requested, but pointing out that three or four extra days would be a great advantage to enable us to complete our preparations. I gather that the French XX Corps on our right cannot be fully ready by the 25th instant."

Critics of generals are too often inclined to analyse their movements with the cold calm eyes of a chess player who sees the whole of the board, and has unlimited leisure in which to consider the next move. In point of fact the general himself is in the position of a chess player who sees hardly half the board, and who has a feverish acquaintance sitting beside him, jogging his elbow and assuring him that unless he moves immediately he will be destroyed. The general of the past, seated on his war horse, surveying the whole field of battle, had often only a few minutes in which to take decisions that decided the movements of tens of thousands of men. But not less urgent were the decisions which were demanded from generals in the last war, who in a few hours had to postpone or to advance by a few days movements upon which the fate of millions depended. When we consider the organisation that was required to control the advance of the British Army in France, which at this date numbered 1,369,100 men, we shall not deem it a small decision that Haig took without

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hesitation to put forward the date of the attack from July 1st to June 25th at the urgent request of his allies.

During these anxious days of preparation Haig made the closer acquaintance of two prominent French politicians. The first was Combes, who will be remembered in history as the despoiler of the French Church. But Haig knew nothing of his antecedents. "M. Combes (a member of the French Government, but without portfolio) came this afternoon and stayed the night. He told me that he will be 81 in a few days, yet he is quite active and did a long afternoon's work in the base camps, hospitals, etc., in Etaples. His mind, too, is alert, and I had some interesting talks with him. His father, he said, was a 'working man', and he educated himself. He had been Prime Minister of France, but is now in the Government solely because he feels it his duty to help the state at this time. His presence gives stability to the Government. He brought me three messages from his colleagues:

"(1) Regarding the High Command: The position of Joffre is now quite strong.

"(2) So also is the Government. A secret session of the *Chambre* was asked for. M. Briand agreed to have one. Now the number who want it is so small that they have requested it may be cancelled.

"(3) His third point was regarding myself, and he was to tell me that not only the Government but the French people had full confidence in me. I said that I had really done nothing to merit it, and he said that I would be surprised to hear what statements had been made by all classes in the French Parliament regarding my Command. It was in order to make my acquaintance that he had come to see me, etc., etc.

"I, of course, felt pleased. I told him a few home truths, however, and said it was a mistake to change any of the



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Staff at Chantilly at this time just before a battle. He quite agreed, and said he would give my views at the secret session. I also said Joffre and Castelnau were the complement of each other. Joffre the strategist, Castelnau the tactician."

A few days later Briand himself arrived at G.H.Q. "Monsieur Briand and I", writes Haig, "took a little walk before dinner. He is certainly a very charming but a cunning, quick-minded man. He is full of compliments for the British Army and of confidence in me. He is well pleased with the result of the secret session of the *Chambre*, and says he will have no more real trouble for some time to come. We had a very cheery dinner. Briand thoroughly French and full of jokes and stories."

On the following day Briand made a tour of inspection and on his return expressed his delight and surprise at all he had seen. "He told me he had no idea of the tremendous organisation of the British Army. I told him it was not for me to publish our doings in the newspapers either in France or in England."

The ease with which he could appreciate the good points in men of different types and nationalities should correct the erroneous impression of Haig as a stolid Scotsman, incapable of approving of anybody who was not a British officer of the old school.

The decision having been taken and arrangements made for the attack to take place on the 25th, a telephone message was received from Joffre on the evening of the 16th requesting that it should be postponed until the 29th or even till the 1st July. Haig immediately agreed to postpone till the 29th, "but not a day later—many guns having been withdrawn from the rest of our front and on their way to the Fourth Army".

Joffre visited Haig on the following day when it was

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agreed that the attack should be fixed for the 29th, but that Rawlinson and Foch, who was in charge of the group of French Armies on the right of the British and therefore the French general principally concerned, should be given power if the weather were bad to postpone the attack until it improved.

On the 23rd Foch pressed for a further delay of two days; but Haig replied that the date had been settled with Joffre, and that he could not alter it unless Joffre asked him to do so.

But at 10.30 a.m. on June 28th, "Rawlinson telephoned that owing to rain bombardment today was impossible, and thought it desirable to postpone our infantry attack for one day (24 hours). I replied to wait till 12 noon before deciding. If it was still unlike clearing, he was then at liberty to postpone the attack. Eventually it rained heavily, and about 1 o'clock, after consulting his corps commanders, Rawlinson decided to postpone the attack for 48 hours as the ground is very wet, and some trench mortar emplacements are deep in water. This enables the troops holding the line to be relieved."

On the night of the 30th Haig concludes his diary for the month with these words, "The weather report is favourable for tomorrow. With God's help, I feel hopeful. The men are in splendid spirits, several have said that they have never before been so instructed and informed of the nature of the operations before them. The wire has never been so well cut, nor the artillery preparation so thorough. I have seen personally all the corps commanders and one and all are full of confidence."

A few days earlier he had written to his wife, "I note what you write that 'for this coming offensive ask for God's help'. Now you must know that I feel that every step in my plan has been taken with the Divine help—and I ask daily for aid, not merely in making the plan, but in carry-

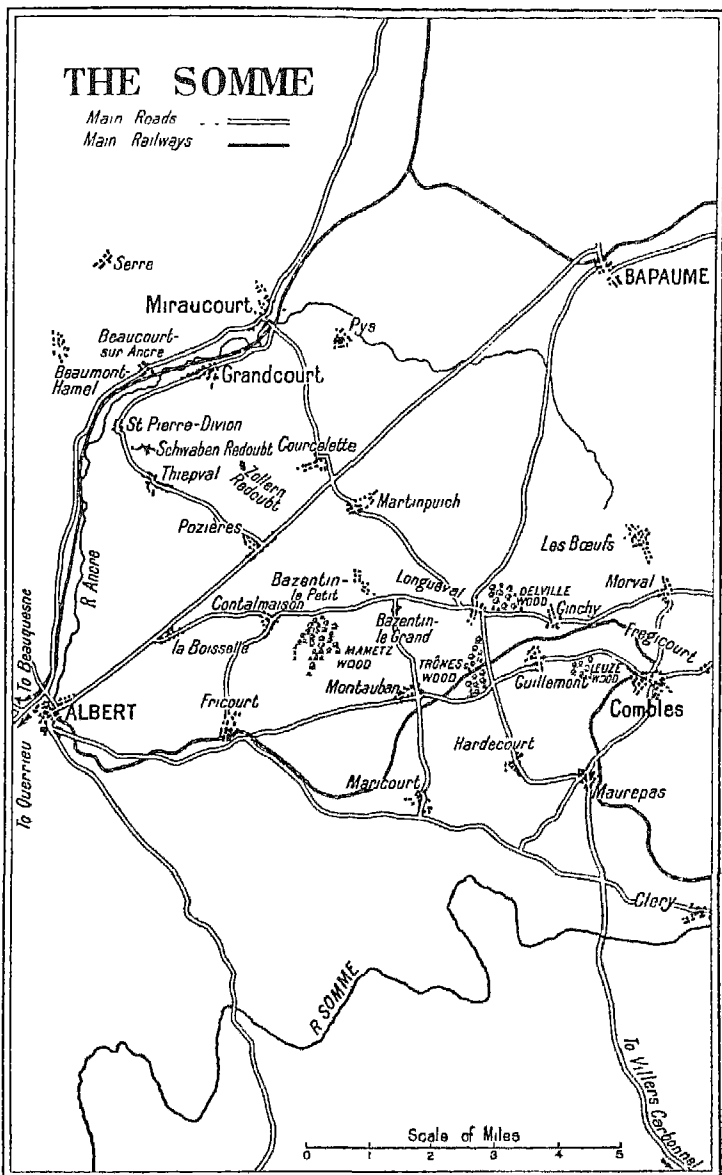
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ing it out, and this I hope I shall continue to do until the end of all things which concern me on earth. I think it is this Divine help which gives me tranquillity of mind and enables me to carry on without feeling the strain of responsibility to be too excessive. I try to do no more than 'do my best and trust to God', because of the reasons I give above. Very many thanks for telling me your views on this side of my work, because it has given me the chance of putting my ideas on paper. For otherwise I would not have written them, as you know I don't talk much on religious subjects."

# THE SOMME

Main Roads - - -

Main Railways ———



L. Stanford, London



## Chapter XV

# THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

For seven long days the bombardment had continued. From British guns alone over one million, six hundred thousand shells had been hurled into the German lines. The French bombardment had been equally heavy. What the enemy had suffered surpassed, by his own admission, all previous experience or imagination. In many places it had proved impossible to bring up any supplies for three days and the troops had not only eaten their iron ration, preserved for the last emergency, but had subsequently been without food for many hours. They knew that the great attack was coming and they prayed that it might come soon.

Rawlinson had desired that the attack should take place before dawn, in order that his men might cross over no man's land unseen by the enemy. But the French had thought differently, and he had been obliged to give way. The place, the date, the hour—all these had been decided by the French. It was accordingly at seven-thirty a.m. on the 1st of July that the barrage at last lifted and along sixteen miles of front the British infantry leapt from their trenches and surged forward to the assault, their fixed bayonets gleaming in the early sunshine of a perfect summer morning.

In the Château de Valvion at Beauquesne, whither his advanced headquarters had been moved a few days pre-

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viously, Haig sat by the telephone, waiting for news. The first that arrived, at about eight a.m., was satisfactory. The British infantry were reported everywhere to have crossed the enemy's front trenches. But gradually information began to be received of troops being held up at various points and some of the earlier more favourable reports began to be contradicted. Fricourt, the key of the position, the hinge of the attack, was still holding out, and in the afternoon Haig drove over to see Rawlinson and to discuss the situation.

It had been confidently anticipated that after the terrific bombardment not only would the German front line be utterly obliterated, but also that the troops, who should be occupying it, would be too demoralised to fight. The extent to which the Germans had recently improved and perfected their system of underground defences was not yet known to the Allies. The dugouts, sometimes of two storeys, enabled the whole garrison of a trench to remain in safety during a bombardment and to reappear on the surface the moment that it ceased, in sufficient time to man their machine guns before the enemy, advancing in daylight, could reach their lines.

Haig had suggested that advance trenches for the purpose of the assault should be dug within two hundred yards of the enemy's front line. Divisional commanders, however, had protested that the digging of such trenches would afford warning to the enemy and after some discussion the decision was left to the corps commanders who, for the most part, did not adopt the suggestion. There is no doubt that, if the distance between the two front lines had been shorter, thereby enabling the attackers to reach their objectives before the defenders had had time to emerge from their dugouts and man the parapets, the results of the day's fighting might have been very different, and would not

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have justified the remark of an American general, who said that the Battle of the Somme was lost by three minutes.

It was also the case that the wire entanglements in front of the trenches had not been destroyed to the extent that was believed. In many cases there were avenues cut through the wire, down which the trench might be approached; but when the attackers were compelled to crowd into such an avenue they naturally presented a fearfully easy target to the guns and rifles of the defenders.

Haig had desired that the infantry should advance in small bodies making quick rushes and lying down between, but his Army Commanders had favoured the alternative method of long waves surging steadily forward at regular intervals, and in this particular he had given way to their wishes. There is no doubt that the former method, which is now universally adopted in training, would have proved more efficacious and less costly.

These are some of the reasons for the limited success achieved on the first day of the great battle. It must also be remembered that the vast majority of the troops in khaki, both officers and men, had been civilians eighteen months before with no previous experience of military training, and that they were matched with the finest fighting force of highly trained warriors that the diligence and the ingenuity of man had ever sent into the field.

The next day was Sunday, and Haig describes it as "a day of downs and ups. . . . The news about 8 a.m. was not altogether good. We held Montauban in spite of a counter-attack delivered at dawn. This is good, but the enemy is still in Fricourt, La Boisselle, Thiepval. It was also said that we had two battalions cut off in the Schwaben redoubt (on the hill north of Thiepval) and also that the VIII Corps (Hunter-Weston) had two battalions cut off at Serre.

"At 9.30 a.m. I attended Church Service in a hut near



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Beauquesne. The Rev. Mr. Duncan preached an excellent sermon: 'Ye are fellow workers with God.'

"After Church I and Kiggell motored to Querrieu and saw Sir Henry Rawlinson. I directed him to devote all his energies to capturing Fricourt and neighbouring villages, so as to reduce the number of our flanks, and then advance on enemy's second line. I questioned him as to his views of an advance from Montauban and his right, instead of from Thiepval and left. He did not seem to favour the scheme."

In the afternoon he visited General Gough, who was in command of the VIII and the X Corps, which formed the left wing of Rawlinson's Army.

On the following day there took place an unfortunate interview with Joffre which, since many inaccurate versions of it have reached the public, had best be described in Haig's own words.

"By request I received Generals Joffre and Foch about 3 p.m. today. The object of the visit was to 'discuss future arrangements'. Joffre began by pointing out the importance of our getting Thiepval Hill. To this I said that in view of the progress made on my right near Montauban, and the demoralised nature of the enemy's troops in that area, I was considering the desirability of pressing my attack on Longueval. I was therefore anxious to know whether in that event the French would attack Guillemont. At this, General Joffre exploded in a fit of rage. *He* could not 'approve of it'. He *ordered* me to attack Thiepval and Pozières'. 'If I attacked Longueval I would be beaten,' etc., etc. I waited calmly till he had finished. His breast heaved and his face flushed. The truth is the poor man cannot argue, nor can he easily read a map. But today I had a raised model of the ground before us. There were also present at the meeting Generals Kiggell and Foch and Renouard

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(from G.Q.G.) and Foch's Chief Staff Officer (Weygand). Only Joffre, Foch and I spoke. When Joffre got out of breath I quietly explained what my position is relatively to him as the 'Generalissimo'. *I am solely responsible to the British Government for the action of the British Army*; and I had approved the plan, and must modify it to suit the changing situation as the fight progresses. I was most polite. Joffre saw that he had made a mistake and next tried to cajole me. He said that this was the 'English battle' and 'France expected great things from me'. I thanked him, but said I had only one object, viz. to beat Germany. France and England march together, and it would give me equal pleasure to see the French troops exploiting victory as my own. After this there was a more friendly discussion between Foch and me. Joffre and I then went out into the garden where Joffre presented General Kiggell with the 'Grand Officier' of the Legion of Honour, and Davidson with the next rank of the Order and kissed them each twice, a resounding smack on each cheek. I soothed old Joffre down, and he seemed ashamed of his outburst and I sent him and Foch off to Amiens. All present at the interview felt ashamed of Joffre. This is evidently the way he behaved before Gillinsky, the Russian General, who was the first to tell me of Joffre's impatience. Still Joffre has his merits. I admire the old man's pluck under difficulties, and am very fond of him. However, I have gained an advantage through keeping calm. My views have been accepted by the French Staff and Davidson is to go to lunch with Foch tomorrow at Dury to discuss how they (the French) can co-operate in our operation, that is the capture of Longueval."

The unusually authoritative tone that Joffre assumed on this occasion may have been due to the fact that in the attack of July 1st the French troops, operating on the right

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of the British, had been far more successful in obtaining their objectives. This was to be attributed partly to their adoption of the method of advance by small parties and quick rushes, partly to the concentration of all their preliminary bombardment on to the enemy's front line, and partly to the Germans' conviction that after the punishment the French had received at Verdun they were not likely to advance at all.

In the midst of these preoccupations Haig received a telegram from Lord Esher, who was acting as a kind of unofficial British representative in Paris, to the effect that Colonel Repington, *The Times* military correspondent, was in Paris, and suggesting that he should be invited to visit the Army. To foster a favourable press was an idea abhorrent to all Haig's principles and practice. A few weeks earlier Robertson had wanted him to invite some of the principal newspaper proprietors to visit him. He had then excused himself on the ground that he was too busy in making the final preparations for the coming battle. He now told Charteris, the Chief of Intelligence, to treat Repington, for whom personally he had little respect, in the same way as any other press correspondent. But Charteris, justly appreciating the importance both of Repington and of *The Times*, arranged for him to have an interview with the Commander-in-Chief. Haig received him with reluctance and, if he attempted, did not succeed in concealing his sentiments, for Repington in his diary concludes his description of the interview "I don't know which of us was the most glad to be rid of the other."

Haig's frank sincerity in all his dealings whether with allies, politicians or the press, was certainly the wisest policy for one who was incapable of duplicity. The scene that had taken place with Joffre does not appear to have produced any unfavourable impression on the other French Generals

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present, for when Foch and Weygand visited Haig on July 6th all passed off happily.

"General Foch and Colonel Weygand (his C.S.O.) came to lunch. I had a short talk with him before. All questions regarding the co-operation of the French XX Corps and our XIII Corps have been arranged for tomorrow's action. The French will take Hardecourt and knoll to north of it and put barrage in front of Guillemont.

"As regards the next step, when we attack Longueval and west of it to Bazentin-le-Petit, he has not sufficient troops on the spot to take Maurepas, because his communications north of the river won't admit of feeding more than his present number. He will, however, support us with counter-batteries as much as possible. Then, when we attack Guillemont, he will extend his position eastwards and take Maurepas, also (on left bank of Somme) to Villers Carbonnel (on the Amiens-St. Quentin road). This latter as soon as possible.

"In the subsequent advance, we will take Ginchy and Morval, and the valley of Combles will be the dividing line.

"I confirmed the promise which we have several times given, viz. to hand over communications south of Albert-Bapaume road as soon as we have secured the heights of Pozières-Longueval. He assured me that he will do all that is possible to support us in our efforts to gain the latter ridge.

"Lunch went off most satisfactorily. After it, Foch and I walked in the garden for about an hour, and then left quite delighted with his reception. He seemed to be doubtful of how I would combine with him in these operations in view of his past difficulties with the British in Sir John French's time."

During all these days fierce fighting continued. One day the British attempted to consolidate their gains, the next day the Germans launched a determined counter-attack,

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and the line of battle swayed to and fro. Meanwhile Rawlinson under Haig's directions was busily preparing for the further attack which Haig had outlined to Joffre.

On July 10th, "After lunch I visited Querrieu and saw Rawlinson and his C. of S. (Montgomery). I questioned him about the plan of attack against Longueval ridge. He proposed to form up two divisions in the dark and attack at dawn over an open maidan against the front Bazentin-le-Grand wood to Longueval. Farther to the west the attack will be made by the 15th Division.

"As regards the first day of the bombardment, I said Mametz Wood and Contalmaison must be in our hands to secure our left flank, while Trônes wood must be held on our right. At present the enemy is in Trônes wood, but we'll recapture the whole of it tonight. Progress in Mametz wood is satisfactory; and we should capture Contalmaison this afternoon."

Optimism was justified, for by the following morning the Germans had been driven out of Trônes wood and the British had possession of the whole of Contalmaison and of the great part of Mametz wood.

Haig had serious doubts as to the wisdom of Rawlinson's suggestion for attacking at dawn. He feared that the forming up of two divisions in no man's land in the dark might lead to confusion in view of the inexperience of most of the staff officers concerned and the limited training of the troops. But Rawlinson, ably supported by his Chief of Staff, Montgomery, stuck to his suggestion and urged it with so much force that Haig, having insisted on certain minor modifications, eventually agreed. The result was a brilliant success.

"*Friday, 14th July, 1916.* Fine night but slight drizzle about 7 a.m.

"Very heavy artillery bombardment about 2.30 and then

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at 3.30 a.m. I looked out at 2.30, it was quite light but cloudy. Just the weather we want for our attack this morning. The noise of the artillery was very loud and the light from the explosion of the shells was reflected from the heavens on to the ceiling of my room. Last night 1st Division captured Contalmaison and Lower Wood.

"At 3.25 a.m. today, after 5 minutes intense bombardment, we attacked enemy's second line from west of Bazentin-le-Petit wood to Longueval with the 21st, 7th, 3rd and 9th Divisions. Our attack went right through to the objectives without a pause and by 9 a.m. we were holding the whole of Bazentin-le-Petit wood and village, and the whole of Bazentin-le-Grand village and wood—also all Longueval village except part of the north end. Most of Delville wood and all Trônes wood is now in our hands. At 7.40 a.m. cavalry advanced to seize High Wood, but ground was very slippery; it was difficult to get forward. General Macandrew commanding the division had two falls. So High Wood was shelled and infantry was pushed on to take it. Fierce fighting continued all day, and we increased our gains of the morning. Enemy retook Bazentin-le-Petit, but it was retaken by the 7th Division, High Wood was taken by the 15th Division, and was connected up with Bazentin-le-Petit in the evening.

"After lunch I visited General Rawlinson and congratulated him and Fourth Army on their splendid performance this morning. I also asked for the names of the 100 men of the West Kents who had held out in Trônes wood for 48 hours. I mean to publish their names and give them Military Medals.

"I saw General Foch at Querrieu. He is very pleased with the result of our attack. French H.Q. openly said their troops could not have carried out such an attack, not even the XX Corps!"

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Lord Esher in Paris was able to hand a copy of the telephone message containing the good news to the President of the Republic in the middle of the official ceremonies celebrating the national fête of France. Rejoicings were general and congratulations flowed in to the British Army, to Rawlinson and to Haig. But, as so often happens in warfare, the exploitation of the victory left something to be desired. Cavalry had been brought up and it did seem at one moment that they might be used with effect and that the resumption of open warfare was at hand. But the opportunity, if it existed, was lost. The enemy were able to bring up their reinforcements, counter-attacks were delivered and the long battle went on.

About this time the importance of the press was once more forcibly obtruded upon Haig's notice by a letter he received from Sir Reginald Brade, the Permanent Under-Secretary to the War Office. He was informed that Mr. Lloyd George was most anxious that "some special attention" should be paid to Lord Northcliffe who was intending shortly to visit the Australian troops at the invitation of Mr. Hughes, the Australian Prime Minister.

It would have seemed strange to Wellington in the Peninsula, strange to Raglan in the Crimea, strange even to Kitchener in the Sudan or to Roberts in South Africa, if they had received a request, which from the Secretary of State for War amounts to an instruction, to show special attention to the owner of a newspaper. But times had changed and the power of the press, which had been developing rapidly, had at this moment reached its apogee, a point which it had never approached before and has hardly maintained since. In time of war the influence of newspapers increases together with, but out of proportion to, their circulation. Anxious men and women are a prey to every rumour. News is their daily sustenance. Those whose

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business it is to present the news, to draw conclusions from the facts and to mould opinion in conformity with those conclusions, exercise at such periods an influence over the minds of their fellow subjects which it would be difficult to over-estimate. Even in the Crimean War *The Times*, with its minute circulation according to modern standards, had largely contributed towards the downfall of Lord Aberdeen's administration. But in 1916 the owner of *The Times* spoke through its columns to an enormously increased circulation and was able to express the same opinions in a louder voice with larger headlines to the million readers of the *Daily Mail*. A score of minor publications conveyed reflections of identic views through many different channels in many parts of the country to countless sections of the community.

Lord Northcliffe was undoubtedly the most powerful newspaper owner that has yet existed in this, or perhaps in any country, and during the war he was at the height of his power. Such a phenomenon no government could wisely disregard. Control had to be exercised, and there are only two ways of controlling a man—by persuasion or by force. To Asquith, a true Liberal of the nineteenth century, both methods were equally abhorrent. It would have been as distasteful to his inclinations to invite the editor of a newspaper to luncheon with a view to influencing his leading articles, as it would have been abhorrent to his principles to restrict the freedom of the press. Lloyd George suffered from no such disabilities. He appreciated the fact that Northcliffe was an intensely patriotic man and he believed that both from a personal and a public point of view his assistance might prove invaluable.

It was therefore as a result of Lloyd George's desire that Northcliffe arrived at Haig's headquarters on July 21st. Haig as usual allowed no previous opinions to prevent him



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from forming a fair judgment. The entry in his diary is as follows: "Lord Northcliffe arrived today and stayed the night. I was favourably impressed with his desire to do his best to help win the war. He was most anxious not to make a mistake in anything he advocated in his newspapers, and for this he was desirous of seeing what was taking place. I am therefore letting him see *everything* and talk to anyone he pleases."

When Lady Haig, who was disturbed by the presence of Lord Northcliffe at G.H.Q., ventured to express her sentiments in a letter, her husband replied, "I quite think as you do, that you and I often have the same thought in common. So I see nothing extraordinary that you should feel worried about Lord Northcliffe's visit when I myself was much exercised in my mind whether to receive him or not. As a matter of fact, a man more unlike the *Daily Mail* than Lord Northcliffe is, it is difficult to imagine."

And a few days later he wrote again: "Lord Northcliffe lunched today. I quite like the man; he has the courage of his opinions and thinks only of doing his utmost to help to win the war."

Frank and open-minded as ever, Haig had succeeded in making a friend, for the time being, of one who could prove a dangerous enemy. One Sunday "Lord Northcliffe came to the Church of Scotland with me at 9.30 a.m. He was much struck with the Rev. Mr. Duncan and his sermon. Lord N. was, he said, much pleased with his visit and asked me to let Sassoon send him a line should anything appear in *The Times* which was not altogether to my liking. He also said that Repington had now no influence with *The Times*; they employed him to write certain articles but he (Lord N.) knew that he was not reliable."

The favourable impression was apparently mutual, for on the 7th August Lord Esher wrote from Paris—"This

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steady but fatalistic progress is wonderful. It must be due to what Northcliffe calls 'your Fifeshire chin' . . . I talked with him for hours. He is now keenly alive to what has got to be done, and your last talk with him was most useful."

It was during these days of constant fighting that Haig learnt to appreciate the splendid qualities of the Australian troops that were serving under him. Although the fighting and the shell fire were far more severe than anything they had experienced at Gallipoli, and although they found the German a very much more formidable foe than the Turk, their high courage and their high spirits remained indomitable. Difficulty was found in estimating their casualties owing to their reluctance to leave the front line. When a battalion was relieved many of them would remain with the relieving force and on one occasion a regiment began an action with nine hundred men and ended it with one thousand three hundred owing to the addition of volunteers from the units which had been ordered to retire for a rest. On another occasion it was reported that "the Australians had at the last moment said that they would attack without artillery support and that they did not believe machine gun fire could do them much harm". A tendency to underestimate dangers was their only failing.

The Duke of Wellington was never interested in historical accounts of the Battle of Waterloo, and he said on one occasion that you could no more describe a battle than you could describe a ball—meaning, supposedly, that so many different events were occurring at the same time on different parts of the front that it would surpass the wit of man to give an accurate account of each of them, and that, even if such a series of accounts were given, the sum of them would present no perfect picture of the whole. If this were true when decisive battles were fought between sun-

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rise and sundown, and the number of all the troops engaged seldom exceeded five figures, how much more true does it become when battles continue for many months and armies are engaged each of whose total strength—even on the front concerned—exceeds a million.

All through August the contest continued. Attack, counter-attack—ground gained, lost, regained and lost again—a long-drawn-out and bitter tale of effort, suffering, failure and glory. It is not the duty of the Commander-in-Chief's biographer to describe in detail each or any of these continual actions which in the scale of world warfare become almost insignificant, but which, judged by the standards of the past, would have made every one of these autumn days as memorable in the annals of the countries concerned as the anniversaries of Agincourt, of Rossbach or of Valmy.

Daily in his diary Haig recounts the details of the last day's fighting, the painful inch gained here, the painful inch lost there. Daily he visited the subordinate generals most nearly concerned and discussed with Rawlinson and others plans for the future. Early in the month he was informed that Monro, who had been with him since the beginning of the war and who now commanded the First Army, was to be Commander-in-Chief in India. Haking was temporarily appointed to take his place, which was later filled by Horne, who was at present commanding the XV Corps in action and therefore could not be spared.

How simple now must have appeared to Haig the duties and difficulties of Corps and even of Army Commanders in comparison with the dread responsibility that hung upon the Commander-in-Chief. They, after all, had only to do what they were told and do it to the best of their ability. It is of himself as Commander-in-Chief and not as king that

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Henry V is thinking when in Shakespeare's play he exclaims:

*"Upon the king! Let us our lives, our souls,  
Our debts, our careful wives,  
Our children and our sins lay on the king!  
We must bear all. O hard condition,  
Twin-born with greatness. . . ."*

But a Commander-in-Chief, who is also a sovereign, has at least the satisfaction of knowing that criticism can only come from those he commands, not also from those he serves. Already there were ominous rumblings from those who were responsible not to the men in the trenches, but to the men on the back benches and throughout the constituencies. "The powers that be are beginning to get a little uneasy in regard to the situation," wrote Robertson at the end of July. "The casualties are mounting up and they are wondering whether we are likely to get a proper return for them."

The powers that were are not to be blamed for their anxiety. Had each of the ministers concerned been a dictator he could have afforded to trust his generals and disregard public opinion. But, as it was, each minister depended for his continuance in office on the support of the elected representatives of the people, and was therefore in duty bound to lend an ear to rumours of discontent. That such rumours were carefully fomented and spread by those who desired a change in the administration may well have happened, but no minister in a democratic community can be blamed for listening to and being influenced by the voice of the people.

Haig replied categorically to such questions as the Cabinet asked, such criticisms as they adumbrated. He pointed out that the effect of the fighting had already been

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to relieve the pressure upon Verdun; and it was, after all, the pressure upon Verdun and nothing else that had caused the attack to be delivered at that place and at that time. He added that the remarkable success achieved by the Russian offensive—the last Russian success in the war—would have been checked easily if the enemy had been free to transfer troops from the Western to the Eastern Front. Further, not only had tremendous losses been inflicted on the enemy, but also it had been proved that the best German troops in the most carefully prepared and most strongly defended positions were not invincible, and that the new British Army, composed of civilian volunteers, was capable of meeting on equal terms and of vanquishing any soldiers in the world.

The explanation was considered sufficient. On August 8th the War Committee of the Cabinet agreed unanimously that "the C.I.G.S. should send a message to General Sir D. Haig assuring him that he might count on full support from home".

This, for the time being, was satisfactory, as also was the re-establishment of cordial relations with Joffre.

On August 6th "Between 2 and 3 p.m. General Joffre came to see me. He travelled in his train to Doullens station and motored on here. It was a much more chastened Joffre than on 3rd July. He was in very good spirits, not so tired as hitherto, and with a beard of four days' growth. He seemed extremely pleased with everything we had done, and full of compliments. He was also greatly delighted at the remarks which I had made about him in my message to the French on the third anniversary of the war. 'As long as I got on well with him there was nothing to be feared from the politicians,' he said. My message is in the *Matin* of 2nd August. He brought me a box of 50 Croix de Guerre for me to distribute as I thought right. A nice little

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attention on his part, and a sort of peace offering after the previous stormy interview between us here. I managed to get together ten officers who had rendered 'good service under fire', and he presented the crosses himself to them."

The King paid another visit to France during this month of August and encouraged the troops by his presence and the Commander-in-Chief by his confidence. On his return to London he wrote Haig the following letter in his own hand:

Buckingham Palace,  
*Aug. 16th, 1916.*

"My dear Haig,

I have arrived home and wish to lose no time in letting you know how greatly I have enjoyed my visit to your splendid Army. It is especially pleasing to me to find that the absolute confidence I have in you, is shared throughout your command.

"The spirit of loyalty which unites every part of the Army must give it an additional strength in your hands; I heard from all sides what a happy army it is.

"I was deeply interested in everything I saw and only wish that my stay could have been longer. I will not repeat the views expressed in my General Order of yesterday.

"I thank you sincerely for your kind hospitality, and also for placing at my disposal Major Thompson, who was not only a charming companion, but the greatest help to me in arranging our daily programmes, the details of which must have given him much work and trouble. In the eight days I motored 687 miles.

Hoping that all may go well

Believe me

very sincerely yours,

GEORGE R.I.

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With the support of the Cabinet, the friendship of the Generalissimo and the confidence of the Sovereign, Haig was well fortified to continue the fearful struggle of the Somme. Before His Majesty left France he had had an interview with the President of the French Republic during part of which Haig had been present. On this occasion "Monsieur Poincaré pointed out the importance of continuing to press the enemy vigorously, and in his opinion a general attack on a wide front should be made as soon as possible. I agreed but said the first object must be to get the French up into line with us, and that General Foch and I were agreed as to our future plans. I hear from other sources that the Russians have been reproving M. Poincaré on the small progress made by the French and for allowing three divisions of Germans to be withdrawn from France to Russia. M. Poincaré thought the whole situation very favourable for the Allies, but was most anxious, before the approach of winter, that we should make some decisive advance in order to keep the people of France and England from grumbling."

Lloyd George paid G.H.Q. a fleeting visit about this time and his relations with the Commander-in-Chief were most amicable. He assured him that he had "no intention of meddling and that his sole object was to help", and he suggested sending out Sir Eric Geddes to enquire into the whole transport question on both sides of the channel. A narrow-minded soldier might have objected to the intrusion of a civilian into a matter which was already under the control of a competent general, who was supposed to understand it perfectly. But Haig, who always put efficiency above red tape, welcomed the suggestion, welcomed Sir Eric when he arrived and worked with him for the next two years in perfect harmony. As usual he took the man on his merits and liked him as soon as they met.

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"August 24th. Sir Eric Geddes, for the last month in Munitions Branch and before that Manager of N.E. Railway, arrived from England. He is sent out by Mr. Lloyd George to assist over the question of communications. A most pleasant and capable man. He is afraid that the Inspector General of Communications resents his visit. I said that I am glad to have practical hints from anyone capable of advising."

Meanwhile small attacks were continuing and greater ones were being planned.

On August 16th "Between 2 and 3 p.m. General Foch came to see me. We were in agreement as to the objectives of our attacks on 18th and 22nd. The question was, what was to be done subsequently. General Weygand (Foch's Staff Officer) produced a letter from Joffre containing certain 'directions'. I said that I thought it was better to deal with the actual situation as it existed, instead of presuming we gained certain positions and then making plans which events would probably oblige us to change. So we discussed the situation as it confronts us, and we agreed that when the French attack the line which runs south from Frégicourt (east of Combles) to the Somme east of Cléry, we will attack Ginchy telegraph and the enemy's line in Leuze wood. And I added that we should engage the enemy on as wide a front as possible at the same time, but I could not promise to advance my left to Pys, because that would give me another salient on the left flank as well as the one we have now on our right at Delville wood. We must adhere to the principle to 'attack together and on as wide a front as possible'. Foch said that 'the Russians were crying out'. They had complained that the French were not doing enough. Then Joffre urges Foch to greater activity and the latter comes to try and induce me to press on, so as to withdraw some of the enemy's pressure from



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his front. Foch told me that the Russians think that by September the Austrians will be completely exhausted, but they fear that the Germans may bring their big guns from France and block their advance."

Relations between Haig and Foch were steadily improving as their acquaintance grew. They had not taken to each other immediately, Foch being as intensely French as Haig was intensely Lowland Scottish, but Haig throughout the war realised the vital importance of maintaining friendly relations with French generals and spared no effort to achieve his purpose.

"Friday, August 18th. Having an idea that Foch is being given a baddish time by Joffre on the one hand, who is urging him to greater activity, and by Fayolle, commanding Sixth Army, on the other hand, who says his troops (XX Corps) are so done up that they cannot attack this afternoon and must be relieved, I wrote an invitation asking him (Foch) to lunch Sunday and sent it by Gemeau to Dury. Foch is delighted to lunch and told Gemeau to assure me that the French would attack with the greatest energy between my right and the Somme. I still fear that these troops have not got it in them, in spite of Foch's and Fayolle's orders. Gemeau also saw Joffre at Dury, who told him to tell me that I might depend on them to attack on 22nd as arranged."

A series of attacks during the last fortnight of August met with a considerable measure of success and on the 27th an important conference was held in a railway train at Saleux station to discuss future operations. The French President, Prime Minister and Minister of War attended together with Joffre and Castelnau and the three Commanders of Army Groups, Foch, Pétain and Franchet d'Esperey. Haig was the only representative of Great Britain.

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"A memorandum had been prepared dealing with the strengths in men and guns and divisions of each of the Allies and of each of the enemy countries. We went through this, discussing the several points as they arose. The main discussion turned on the reorganization of the French Army into divisions of three 'regiments' (about equal to our brigades), which was necessary owing to a shortage of men. The most suitable number of guns which should be allotted to a division was also considered. Foch maintained that next spring the French Army would still be short of guns, and that the shortage of personnel did not matter. Briand pointed out the great difficulties France laboured under owing to the north-east of France being in enemy hands. They would, however, manufacture as much as they could, and England would probably be able to supply some guns after the British Army had been provided. Our object was to be as strong as possible by next spring.

"M. Poincaré mentioned that the Pope had stated that the enemy would be forced to ask for an armistice by October. He should advise that the reply should be the same as that given by the Romans. 'No talk of peace so long as one enemy remained on the soil of the Republic.'

"Poincaré objected to the proposal to reduce the number of French regiments. The effect on the morale of the country and the Allies must be remembered, when it is announced that regiments are to be abolished. 'The Colonel and the Flag' (i.e. the regimental colours) 'must be retained' at all costs.

"In reply to M. Poincaré General Joffre stated that the Russians had not stopped their offensive, but were preparing for another big effort.

"We lunched about 12.30 and continued the discussion afterwards. I sat at lunch at a little table opposite Gen. Joffre. He mentioned that he had that moment received

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my reply to his letter requesting me to attack on the 6th. He would like to talk the matter over with me. We fixed next Friday 1st September, and he is to lunch with me. I mentioned that we could not attack before the 15th September. He replied 'C'est trop tard. C'est la mort.' But could give me no reason!

"Afterwards at the Conference General Foch explained to M. Poincaré the scope of his next operations. I followed and stated that on the 30th I would attack in co-operation with Foch with 10 divisions. That after that effort, a fortnight would be required in which to prepare for another big attack which I hoped to make with 14 divisions. I had every hope of success then, but was anxious that ample French reserves should be available to exploit our success. Both Poincaré and Briand said that was most important. Joffre insisted on an earlier date for my attack, but I pointed out the time required for

- (a) Fighting after attack of 30th;
- (b) Relief of tired divisions by fresh ones;
- (c) Time for the fresh divisions to get acquainted with the ground;
- (d) Time for placing heavy and other artillery to deal with the new objectives.

"The President said that the attack should not be later than 15th September on account of the equinox, when the weather breaks on 25th September, and is usually unsettled for some weeks. I said I would do my best to arrange for our attack not to be later than the 15th.

"The President and his party left then for Eux to inspect the XX Corps and distribute decorations. We took a very friendly farewell of each other; also M. Briand said he would like very much to come and see me again.

"Altogether, the meeting went off well."

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As usual, however, when the date of the attack drew near it was the French who suggested a postponement, and it was not until the 3rd of September instead of the 30th August that it was ultimately delivered. Gough's army played the principal part on this occasion, attacking north and south of the River Ancre with conspicuous success. On this day, the anniversary of Worcester and Dunbar, Guilleumont, which had been so long and so stubbornly defended, fell before the impetuous advance of the 20th Division, and large numbers of prisoners were taken.

Joffre lunched with Haig and was "very pleased with the general situation". In the afternoon they motored to St. Riquier and saw an exercise by eleven tanks and two battalions of infantry. "Joffre seemed much impressed with the possibilities of tanks. He ran about on his little feet until he poured with perspiration."

On the 9th of September there was a further attack and further substantial gains were made. Ginchy was captured and "by the 10th of September", in the words of John Buchan's *History of the War*, "the British had made good the old German second position, and had won the crest of the uplands, while the French in their section had advanced almost to the gates of Peronne. The moment was in a very real sense the end of a phase, the first and perhaps the most critical phase of the Somme battle. The immense fortifications of her main position represented for Germany the accumulated capital of two years. She had raised these defences when she was stronger than her adversaries in guns and men. Now she was weaker and her capital was gone."

Meanwhile through Haig's headquarters there flowed a steady stream of French generals and English notabilities, both politicians and journalists, each of whom he received with an open mind and summed up in a shrewd comment.

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St. Loe Strachey of the *Spectator* he found "rather a talker but an honest man with the courage of his opinions". In Gwynne of the *Morning Post* he commended a healthy distrust of politicians but detected a tendency to exaggerate the power and importance of journalists. Spender of the *Westminster Gazette* seemed "an honest patriot" and Geoffrey Dawson of *The Times* was "an intelligent and honest fellow". Leo Maxse "a quiet little man, so different to his writings".

One day General Maxse, commanding the 18th Division, came to luncheon. "He had heard from his brother Leo (Editor of the *National Review*) that certain politicians have banded themselves together with the object of having me removed from the command of the Armies in France. General Maxse wished to know whether I thought he ought to urge his brother to take action in the matter. I saw him along with General Kiggell, and I said that I had no dealings with the press personally. That my policy had always been to give the press as free a hand as possible. To show them everything, to allow them to talk to anyone they chose, and to write what they liked, provided no secrets were given away to the enemy. In the present case I saw no reason to depart from this policy. If his brother chose to come to France and go round the Army and see whether —'s statements were true or false, he was free to do so in the ordinary way. I at any rate could take no part in a press campaign against anyone. All my time was taken up in thinking out how to beat the enemy of Great Britain—I mean Germans."

Edwin Montagu, who had succeeded Lloyd George as Minister of Munitions, impressed him as "a capable and agreeable man, who seemed to understand his job though he has only recently taken over. He is full of determination to help the Army as much as he possibly can."

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Barthou, of tragic memory, struck him as "a pleasant little man. . . . His only son was killed early in the war. We had a long talk and I gather that he is prepared to carry on until Germany is beaten in order to have a permanent peace."

It would be absurd in face of tributes such as these to maintain that Haig harboured any ineradicable distrust of politicians, but unfortunately the only one in whom it seemed impossible for him to repose confidence was the Secretary of State for War. He had no reason at present to suppose that he himself was regarded with disfavour. On August 29th Robertson wrote to him reporting a conversation with Lloyd George in which the latter "repeated what he has said many times lately, that he thinks you are playing absolutely the right game, and doing your job in absolutely the right way. You can attach any importance you choose to his opinion, but it will be satisfactory to you to know that he at any rate thinks you are doing quite the right thing." This was after the Battle of the Somme had been in progress for a month.

If confirmation of Robertson's testimony were needed, we have it in Lloyd George's own handwriting. Three weeks later, the battle still continuing, he wrote as follows:

*"21st September, 1916.*

"My dear General,

I found a considerable accumulation of work on my return from France or I should have written to you before to say how much I enjoyed my visit to your command and how agreeable were the impressions I carried away as regards both the preparations for what was then the new offensive to come and the spirit of the commanders and the troops. I am more than glad to feel that all the thought and work, which go to make the success of

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an attack under modern conditions, have given you and your staff just cause for satisfaction.

"I can say, on behalf of my colleagues in the Cabinet as well as for myself, that the heartening news of the last few days has confirmed our anticipations and hopes that the tide had now definitely turned in our favour.

"I congratulate you most warmly on the skill with which your plans were laid, and on the imperturbable bravery of your troops. Such a combination augurs well for further successes, though I realise the difficulties that have to be faced and overcome.

"The story of the tanks has interested me greatly, and has quite captured the attention of the public.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

D. Lloyd George.

"I hope you will let me come over to visit the scenes of your fresh triumphs."

Such praise and appreciation come strangely from one who has since written of "the horrible and futile carnage of the Somme", and has maintained that he was opposed to it from the first. Oddly enough even at the time the words were uttered they failed to convince the man to whom they were addressed of their author's sincerity. Both Asquith and Lloyd George had recently been staying at G.H.Q., and in a letter to his wife Haig had conveyed the several impressions they had made upon him.

"Lloyd George has been with me during the past two days so I have been able to notice the differences in the two men and to realise how much superior in many ways Mr. Asquith is to L.G. I have got on with the latter very well indeed and he is anxious to help in every way he can. But he seems to me to be so flighty—makes plans and is always

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changing them and his mind. Most unpunctual (except when coming to meet me I must confess). But he was 1½ hours late at lunch with General Foch, and M. Thomas told me that was his usual habit when visiting Verdun and the French. On the other hand Mr. Asquith has such a clear and evenly balanced mind.

"His visit too was on business lines. L. G.'s has been a huge 'joy ride'. Breakfasts with newspaper men and posings for the cinema shows pleased him more than anything else. No doubt with the ulterior object of catching votes! From what I have written you will gather that I have no great opinion of L. G. *as a man or leader.*"

This letter was written on the 13th of September and a few days later he obtained striking proof that the instinctive distrust with which Lloyd George had inspired him was not unjustified. On the 17th of September Foch came to visit Haig and after a brief conversation on the military situation "asked me to leave the others and go into the garden. He then spoke to me of Mr. Lloyd George's recent visit to his (Foch's) H.Q. Lunch was at 12 noon and L. G. said he would bring two or three people with him. He actually arrived at 1.45 and brought eight people! Afterwards L. G., using Lord Reading as interpreter, had a private talk with Foch. He began by saying that he was a British minister and as such he considered that he had a right to be told the truth. He wished to know why the British, who had gained no more ground than the French, if as much, had suffered such heavy casualties. Foch replied that the French infantry had learned their lesson in 1914, and were now careful in their advances. He often wished that they were not so well instructed. He would then have advanced much farther and more quickly. In reply to questions about our artillery, Foch said that, in his opinion, the British had done wonders. L. G. also asked his opinion



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as to the ability of the British generals. Foch said 'L. G. was sufficiently patriotic not to criticise the British Commander-in-Chief', but he did not speak with confidence of the other British generals as a whole. Foch's reply was that he had had no means of forming an opinion.

"Unless I had been told of this conversation personally by Gen. Foch, I would not have believed that a British minister could have been so ungentlemanly as to go to a foreigner and put such questions regarding his own subordinates."

Foch's statement that the Secretary of State for War had not actually criticised the Commander-in-Chief is, however, contradicted in the account which Foch himself gave of the same conversation to Henry Wilson and which the latter recorded in his diary. There we read that "Lloyd George said" to Foch "he gave Haig all the guns and ammunition and men he could use and nothing happened. Foch said that Lloyd George was *très monté* against Haig, and he did not think Haig's seat was very secure."

Early in the following month Haig was one day casually informed that General French would be arriving in France almost immediately in order to pay a visit to Joffre and the French Army. "Later in the day", he writes, "I learnt from Lord Derby" (who was staying with him at the time) "that French is visiting Joffre at the instigation of our Secretary of State for War for the purpose of reporting on French artillery and French tactics. How unnecessarily difficult these authorities of ours at home seem to make things for me, struggling to do my best against the enemy. If Lloyd George wishes to know about French guns and their tactics he should ask me. But he has already got my reasoned opinion in the matter of guns, and doubtless wants another opinion differing from mine." Haig decided that French should be treated during his stay in France

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with all the respect due to a British Field Marshal. He sent a special Guard of Honour to meet him at Boulogne and invited him to visit G.H.Q., an invitation which French wisely declined.

Although when French resigned his command he had been loaded with honours and everything had been done to spare his feelings and to recognise his great services, nevertheless the fact remained that less than twelve months before he had left the seat of war under the definite stigma of failure. To send him back now in order to furnish a report on a matter concerning which his successor had already reported was hardly fair to either of the men concerned. It would have been absurd to pretend that there was nobody as well qualified to furnish a report on French artillery, for Lord French was not even an artilleryman. The motive of the mission was obvious. Lloyd George wanted material which would enable him to get rid of Haig. Who would be more competent to collect it than the man whom Haig had supplanted?

On the 15th of September there took place the most important advance that had occurred during the fighting on the Somme. Courcelette and Martinpuich were both captured, the former by the Canadians, the latter by the Scots. As on July 1st the right wing had proved the most successful, so now the tables were reversed and the left wing and centre, comprising a portion of the new Fifth Army, swept all before them while the right wing was held up.

On this day for the first time in history the tanks were seen upon the field of battle. Haig, who was ever ready to welcome new inventions, had encouraged their construction and was eager to make use of them. Robertson referred to them dubiously in a letter a few days before, describing them as a "somewhat desperate innovation". General Swinton, to whose imagination, initiative and per-

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severance the introduction of this invention, destined to revolutionise the art of warfare, was largely due, has described the difficulties that he met with at every stage owing to the distrust and suspicion which new ideas invariably arouse in the official mind. Even after the first trial of the tanks the majority of the senior officers whom General Swinton encountered had no word of encouragement, still less of congratulation, to offer him. When he arrived at G.H.Q. an interview with the Commander-in-Chief was at first politely refused him by a member of the Staff. Finally, "I insisted that the Commander-in-Chief should at least know that I was there, and be given the chance to see me if he wished. He received me almost at once and very cordially. He thanked me for what I had done and said that, though the Tanks had not achieved all that had been hoped, they had saved many lives and had fully justified themselves; that he wanted five times as many; that he wished the existing arrangement to go on; and that I should go home and continue to command, raise and train the force. These were the first words of appreciation given to the Tanks—to my knowledge—since the King saw them at Elveden."<sup>1</sup>

General Swinton believes, and many share his opinion, that a grave error was committed in making use of the tanks at this early stage in their development and when so few of them were as yet available. He does not, however, appear to have expressed this view beforehand to the Commander-in-Chief, of whose intention to employ them he was well aware, and whom he saw more than once during the summer. Winston Churchill, on the other hand, who with characteristic receptivity and vigour had done more than any statesman to foster and further the new invention, and who, while at the Admiralty, had wisely usurped

<sup>1</sup>*Eyewitness*, by Major-General Sir Ernest D. Swinton, page 286.

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functions which the War Office, to whom they properly belonged, had refused to perform, when he heard of the decision to make use of the tanks so early, sought an interview with the Prime Minister in order to register his protest against what he considered the premature revelation to the enemy of a weapon which might later prove the decisive factor in the war. But at this time he held no office and his words, though courteously listened to by Mr. Asquith, went no farther and it was without the benefit of his or General Swinton's advice that Haig took and adhered to his decision.

Whether he was right or wrong must remain for ever a subject of controversy. It may be readily admitted that if the use of the tanks had been delayed until a thousand or more of them could have been thrown into the field simultaneously, if it had been possible during that necessarily lengthy interval to perfect the machinery, train the crews, instruct the infantry how to co-operate and at the same time maintain the secrecy of the invention, the effect when it was finally produced would have been tremendous.

But there are other considerations to be borne in mind. In the first place, it is very easy to be wise after the event, and to show what should have been done in the light of subsequent history. Had a man known that the war must continue until November 11th, 1918, every decision would have been influenced by that knowledge. But there were many who hoped, and their hopes though doomed to disappointment were not conceived without some justification, that a decision might be reached in the autumn of 1916. The great battle that was being fought might prove decisive. The introduction of a new and terrible weapon at the crisis of that battle might prove the final factor—the little particle of extra weight which would decide the balance of the scales.

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Secondly it is impossible ever to gauge the value of a weapon with any accuracy until it has been tried in actual warfare. In vain does the inventor endeavour to foresee all possible contingencies. On the day of battle something happens that nobody has thought of, and the invention, maybe for the lack of some quite easily supplied improvement, is brought to naught. To construct enormous quantities of weapons that have never been used is to back science against experience, to gamble with public funds and to court disaster on a large scale.

Nor does the moment ever arrive when a man can say that an invention has been perfected. The tanks in use at the very end of the war were crude and barbarous in comparison with those that are now manufactured. He would be a bold man indeed who would take it upon himself to decide when the moment had arrived to abandon experiment and to embark upon wholesale construction.

No opinion with regard to this matter deserves to be treated with greater, or perhaps with so great, respect as that of General Fuller. He was one of the few officers in the army, if not the only one, who had foreseen the probable development of trench warfare before the war.<sup>1</sup> He had been an enthusiastic believer in the tanks from the beginning, he had travelled with them to France and had watched their performances in action. Having described these in detail, he summarises his conclusions as follows—"These are the main lessons which were learnt from the tank operations which took place during the battles of the Somme and the Ancre, and the mere fact of having learnt them justifies the employment of tanks during these operations. Further, it must be remembered that, whatever tests are carried out under peace conditions, the only true test of efficiency *is war*, consequently the final test a machine or weapon should get

<sup>1</sup>See *Eyewitness*, p. 62.

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is its first battle, and until this test has been undergone, no guarantee can be given of its real worth, and no certain deductions can be made as to its future improvement."<sup>1</sup>

Equally weighty and equally conclusive is the testimony of Lt.-General Sir Hugh Elles, who commanded the Tank Corps in France during the most eventful period in its history. "The employment of Tanks in the field", he writes, "was one long conflict between policy and expediency. Policy seemed always to demand that we should wait until all was prepared . . . expediency necessitated the employment of all available forces at dates predetermined. . . . Their employment in Flanders has often been criticised without intelligent appreciation of the fact that had they not fought in Flanders they would have probably fought nowhere. Better, therefore, that they should fight and pull less than half their weight, and still save lives, than that they should stand idle while tremendous issues were at stake."<sup>2</sup>

Haig continued to press forward to the attack and on September the 25th a most successful advance was made into the enemy's territory. On a front six miles in length an advance was made to the depth of a mile. Morval, Les Bœufs and Combles were captured. On the left the Fifth Army took Thiepval and the Zollern redoubt. On the right the French were equally successful. The enemy was now driven back to his fourth line of defence and the position of the Allies had never appeared more hopeful. If the pressure against the enemy could be maintained at the same degree of intensity for another six weeks there seemed to be no reason why the ardently desired decision should not be reached before the winter set in. Everything depended upon the weather, which was to prove throughout

<sup>1</sup>*Tanks in the Great War*, by Major-General J. F. C. Fuller, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>*The Tank Corps*, by Major Clough Williams-Ellis, with Foreword by Lt.-Gen. Sir H. Elles, pp. vii-viii.

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the war the least dependable of all the neutrals. Every morning on his way to breakfast Haig consulted the barometer and every day he chronicled its movements in his diary. It is doubtful whether the theory that the continual discharge of heavy artillery induced rain will bear examination, but it is certain that during these four years rain seldom failed to arrive at the most inconvenient moment for the Allies. On September 27th Haig wrote, "Glass fell nearly three-tenths", and thenceforward for the rest of the autumn it rose rarely.

Throughout the month of October the battle fitfully continued and the enemy was granted but little breathing space. On the 21st, during a very brief spell of frost and sunshine, the Germans attempted a counter-attack on the Schwaben redoubt and not only were repulsed with heavy losses, but a British attack timed for the same day was singularly successful, the Fifth Army capturing all objectives over a front of five thousand yards and taking over a thousand prisoners.

Haig was much distressed about this time by the death of Brigadier-General Philip Howell, a brilliant young soldier with whom he had been on terms of close intimacy for many years and for whom he had predicted a great future. Howell had been in Salonika a year before and had sent Haig a report on the situation there which had confirmed his views as to the danger of denuding the Western Front of troops in order to send them to the Balkans. Howell was serving on General Jacob's staff at the time he was killed. Haig wrote of him, "He was a fine capable officer of progressive ideas and is a terrible loss to the Army at this time."

On November 13th was launched the last attack which brought the long battle of the Somme to a close. It was more successful than any that had hitherto been delivered.

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The Fifth Army attacked astride the River Ancre and swept all before them.

"The attack was made with 43 battalions, i.e. parts of 7 divisions. A great artillery concentration was effected, that is to say about the same number of guns were firing today on the spurs about Beaumont-Hamel as we had firing on our whole front on 1st July. By noon Gough's 18 pounders had fired 240,000 rounds. The result was good, because, in spite of the wet ground, our troops took the position without much difficulty and the enemy surrendered much more readily than on any previous occasion. The enemy's front line was very strong, and the villages of Beaumont-Hamel, Beaucourt, Ancre and St. Pierre Divion were very strongly fortified and strongly garrisoned. By 7 p.m. it was stated that 67 officers and 3227 prisoners (unwounded) had passed through the cages, and more were on the way. It is estimated that they number over 4000. This is more than were taken in two days' fighting at Loos. Our losses are estimated at 5000 or 6000.

"After lunch I rode to H.Q. Fifth Army and thanked Gough and his staff for all their efforts. The success has come at a most opportune moment. I met General Jacob commanding II Corps at Gough's. He said he already had over one thousand prisoners south of the Ancre. One tank had gone on beyond St. Pierre Divion and became surrounded by the enemy. Apparently an officer and two men left the tank. The officer was wounded. The N.C.O. and the remainder of the crew continued to fight the tank, and let out a pigeon with a message saying they were in difficulties. A battalion of the Notts and Derby Regiment soon arrived and drove back the Germans and set free the tank's crew. It is very close and hot in the tank when halted.

"General Joffre replied to my letter about our taking over more front, that he agreed though he thought our



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proposal too small and wished us to take over on 1st December and not 1st January as I had suggested. I agreed to the earlier date provided the position about Sailly Saillisel has by then been placed in a defensible state."

The attack was continued on the four following days with increasing success. Each day added to the distance of the advance and the number of prisoners and captured machine guns. But by the 18th the weather brought all to a standstill and the longest battle that had been fought in the world's history was over.

There are still those who argue that the Battle of the Somme should never have been fought and that the gains were not commensurate with the sacrifice. There exists no yardstick for the measurement of such events, there are no returns to prove whether life has been sold at its market value. There are some who from their manner of reasoning would appear to believe that no battle is worth fighting unless it produces an immediately decisive result, which is as foolish as it would be to argue that in a prize fight no blow is worth delivering save the one that knocks the opponent out. In point of fact the final blow may be one of the feeblest, and even the finest judge of the noble art watching the ring most closely would hesitate to lay down definitely which of the blows delivered in the contest contributed most to the result.

As to whether it were wise or foolish to give battle on the Somme on the 1st of July, 1916, there can surely be only one opinion. To have refused to fight then and there would have meant the abandonment of Verdun to its fate and the breakdown of co-operation with the French. When Falkenhayn struck at Verdun he believed that he was striking at the heart of France, and that if he could win Verdun the beating of that heart would cease. Who shall say that he was wrong? There lived no shrewder judge of his

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fellow countrymen than Clemenceau and we have seen how he believed that even a small disaster might produce a peace party who would bring the war to an inglorious conclusion. If the proud boast *Ils ne passeront pas* had once been falsified, where would those who had made it have found the spirit which would have enabled them to continue the fight? And if Verdun had fallen, if the sacrifice of 200,000 lives had been made in vain, what would France have thought of her Ally, who had stood by unmoved, never raising a finger, deaf to those passionate appeals for help? All military writers are agreed that the Battle of the Somme saved Verdun and if no further justification were forthcoming that alone would suffice.

But the Somme did more than this. The British Army that advanced so confidently on the 1st of July was a citizen army, only half trained to war. The survivors in mid November were veterans who could have discussed the military profession as equals with their ancestors who had passed through all the South African, the Crimean or the Peninsular campaigns. As the final test of a new weapon must be the battlefield, so also is the battlefield the only furnace wherein are forged the armies of victory. It was the survivors of the Somme who two years later formed the backbone of the force that smashed the Hindenburg line and drove the invaders off the soil of France.

The German Army, on the other hand, came into battle not with the courage of ignorance but with the confidence of knowledge. The world has never seen a more highly trained and perfectly disciplined machine. From birth every German had been taught to think himself a soldier, he had been fed from childhood on the glorious traditions of Sadowa and Sedan, he had been trained from youth in the exercise of arms, and the military supremacy of Germany had been with him the first article of faith.

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On the Somme they were not taken by surprise; they had had full time to prepare the fortifications behind which they awaited the coming onslaught, and the elaboration, ingenuity and intricacy of those earthworks marked a new epoch in trench warfare. Even Germany could produce no finer soldiers than the men who manned them. Yet after a bombardment such as they had never imagined they found themselves driven at the point of the bayonet out of positions they had believed impregnable. Fighting fiercely, disputing every inch of the ground, inflicting fearful punishment upon the foe, they were none the less compelled to relinquish the trenches they had sworn they would hold to the last. Falkenhayn had given orders that "not a foot's breadth of ground must be abandoned". Von Below had laid down that "only over our dead bodies may the enemy advance". And for the German soldier the result of the Somme was not the loss of a few lines of trenches nor the bitterness of temporary defeat; it was the end of a great tradition, it was the bankruptcy of a religious faith. Two instances were brought to Haig's notice of German officers who, being prisoners, had attempted to commit suicide—a fact of profound significance.

German writers have frankly admitted the psychological effect produced. The historian of the 27 (Württemberg) Division writes, "In the Somme fighting there was a spirit of heroism which was never again found in the Division, however conspicuous its fighting power remained until the end of the war."

Captain von Hentig of the General Staff tells us that "the Somme was the muddy grave of the German field army and of the faith in the infallibility of German leadership. . . . The most precious thing lost on the Somme was the good relationship between the leaders and the led."

Another German writer asserts that "the tragedy of the

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Somme battle was that the best soldiers, the stoutest-hearted men were lost; their numbers were replaceable, their spiritual worth never could be."

But the most conclusive of all evidence is the testimony of General Ludendorff. As the result of the Somme fighting he admits that "we were completely exhausted on the Western Front. . . . If the war lasted our defeat seemed inevitable . . . I cannot see as I look back how the German G.H.Q. could have mastered the situation if the Allies had continued their blows as they did in 1916."<sup>1</sup>

When certain British politicians, alarmed by the number of the casualties, rallied to the cry of "No more Sommes", they little knew that their latest slogan was also the muttered and heartfelt prayer of the whole of the German Army, from the men in the trenches to the Commander-in-Chief.

These then were the results of the first great battle fought under the supreme command of Haig. Verdun was saved, the maintenance of Anglo-French co-operation was assured, the British were taught to fight and the heart of the German Army was broken.

<sup>1</sup>*My War Memories*, by General Ludendorff, vol. 1, pp. 292-307.



## Appendix A

Statement drawn up by Douglas Haig in July, 1895, in response to a request from Sir Evelyn Wood for certain information with regard to the German Army—(see page 44).

*In German Cavalry and Infantry how much do the Non-Commissioned Officers actually do in polishing up the young soldier, and where does the personal instruction of the Officer come in?*

**T**he Officer commanding a Squadron or Company is alone responsible for everything connected with that Squadron or Company. The goal to be reached is clearly indicated, namely, '*Efficiency for War*', but the methods by which that end is to be attained are left *entirely* to the discretion of Company and Squadron Commanders. This initiative of the Squadron and Company Leader is only limited by the necessity imposed on them, that their men must within certain specified times attain certain degrees of efficiency.

The Commanding Officer of a Regiment (and *a fortiori* of a Brigade or Division), is not allowed to meddle with the instruction of Squadrons or to direct that the instruction of a Squadron shall be carried out in one way rather than another. The duty of these superior Officers is to *judge the results* of the instructions given. They do this at the several inspections and, if need be, comment upon any irregularity or omission which they have noticed in the body of troops inspected. Moreover, these Senior Officers have each a specified time in which they instruct the unit entrusted to

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them to command. Seeing then that each Squadron and Company Commander is at liberty to employ his Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers as he chooses in training the men, it is difficult to state precisely at what point the instruction of the Non-Commissioned Officer ceases, and that of the Officer begins.

*The general rule* is that the *first* instruction, both in the Infantry and Cavalry, is given by the best Non-Commissioned Officers available in each Squadron, *under the superintendence of an Officer*, and that upon the men reaching a certain state of proficiency in the several subjects, the Officer then personally instructs. Recruits join in October and by the beginning of March (in Cavalry), they will be under the direct instruction of the Officer charged with their training.

To consider the question in detail. It is necessary to point out first of all, that the training of a Squadron is divided into the following periods throughout the year, in which special attention is given to certain work, though practice in certain duties, such as Feld Dienst (detached duties), musketry practice, and gymnastics, goes on throughout the year without intermission.

October to March - Winter Work.

April to beginning of

June - - - Squadron exercises concluding with Squadron Inspection by Regimental Commander.

8 days in June - - Regimental Drill followed by Regimental Inspection by Brigade General.

Thence to middle of

August - - - Summer Work and leave season.

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Thence to end of Sep-

tember - - - Manoeuvre period.

For the purpose of winter instruction the Squadron is divided into, (1) Recruits; (2) Young horses; (3) Men in second and third year's service.

As a rule the senior 1st Lieutenant is given charge of the young horses, the next senior Officer trains the recruits and the next Officer the old soldiers.

I would here point out that in the event of a Squadron (or Company) being short of Officers, the Non-Commissioned Officer next junior to the Wachtmeister (Squadron Sergeant Major), or to the Feldwebel in the Infantry (who holds nominally the same position as Wachtmeister, but has much less responsibility) does the ordinary work of a Lieutenant, but under no circumstances may such an individual *superintend* recruits: this duty must always be done by an Officer.

The Squadron consists of one hundred and thirty-four men and one hundred and thirty-three horses, and each year some twenty-eight to thirty-four recruits join between the 1st and 6th October. The Squadron Commander hands the recruits over to an Officer for training (usually the second Senior in the Squadron as stated above), and places at his disposal the best of the Non-Commissioned Officers in the Squadron.

The recruits are then divided into a suitable number of squads (usually three or four), which are drilled by Non-Commissioned Officers. There is often a second Non-Commissioned Officer with each squad whose business it is to take over awkward men who are slow at learning.

The chief duty of the Officer at first is to see that the recruits are not ill treated, and that the Squadron Commander's directions are carried out.



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The recruits learn from the commencement.

1. Riding.

2. Lance, sword and carbine drill on foot and then the use of lance and sword on *wooden horses* before executing the exercises mounted.

3. Gymnastics.

4. Musketry.

5. Theoretical instruction.

To begin with, the Non-Commissioned Officers teach all these subjects while the Officer simply directs in chief. After a few weeks the Officer himself gives the theoretical instruction and takes the recruits out for Feld Dienst (detached duties). Towards the end of the winter period (about March) all three or four squads are united for riding in the open and other work included in our "Troop drill".

I would here point out that in some squadrons and regiments the Officer in charge of the recruits himself gives instruction in riding to *each squad* of recruits. This will take three to four hours daily. I give below the usual *daily* timetable of an Officer when superintending the instruction of recruits. It is generally considered sufficient for the Officer, if he has some experience in riding instruction, simply to superintend the Non-Commissioned Officers who do the drilling; this takes one and a half hours daily as shown in the following table of work in winter.

7.30 a.m. to 9. Lance, sword and foot drill.

10 a.m. to 11.30. Riding school.

12 noon to 2. The Officer had himself to ride with the other Officers.

3 p.m. to 4.30. Gymnastics and musketry instruction.

5 p.m. to 6. Theoretical instruction.

All four squads of recruits performed the same duty at the same times.

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The recruits or lowest class of equitation is called "The First Class": about fifty men usually ride in this class as all "casuals" (such as cooks, clerks, orderlies, drivers, etc.), and bad riders join it.

Next there are the "*young horses*". These are divided into three squads as follows:

- (1) Junge Remonten - Horses of 5 years old.
- (2) Alte „ - „ 6 „ „
- (3) Vorjahrige „ - „ 7 „ „  
(remounts of the preceding year).

Some thirteen to fourteen young horses join a squadron each year so there are about forty young horses in all. The senior 1st Lieutenant usually trains these.

Forty young horses—fifty ridden by recruits—Ninety horses accounted for. As there are one hundred and thirty-three horses in a Squadron, there are about forty-three available for men in their second and third year's service to ride. This class is called the "*Second Class*" and consists of the following squads.

*Abteilung A and B.* The *best horses* with men serving their second year who are thought able to break horses the following year.

*Abteilung C.* Difficult horses with men serving a longer time than 2 years.

*Abteilung D.* All men serving their second year who do not ride in Abteil A.

In April the whole Squadron goes out for the practice of the exercises contained in the Drill Book under "Squadron Drill"—In the event of an insufficiency of Officers for 4 troop leaders, then a serjeant will lead the vacant troop.

After the inspection of Squadrons which takes place in the end of May, there are 8 days of Regimental drill followed by the inspection of the Regiment in drill.

Succeeding this period of instruction comes the summer

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period in which detached duties, swimming, pioneering work, field practices, shooting, with one day weekly for regimental drill in the open country or Squadron drill with lance and sword mounted combat. *In all these exercises the Officer instructs* his men. This brings us to the middle of August when the manoeuvre period commences.

As regards the interior arrangements of the Squadron in barracks, the Squadron Commander holds his Squadron Sergeant Major responsible, who in turn holds the other Non-Commissioned Officers responsible.

The Lieutenants thus have no responsibility in this respect. In barracks the Squadron is divided into divisions or squads (Beritt), each commanded by a Non-Commissioned Officer; the number and strength of these varies greatly but usually depend upon the number and size of the rooms. These squads (Beritt) in barracks, have no connection with the squads (Abteilungen) for instruction.

The management of the horses and stable arrangements generally are managed by the Squadron Leader himself assisted by the Squadron Sergeant Major. The Lieutenants have nothing to do in this respect. It would seem as if so much is expected from the Lieutenants in the matter of instruction that no time is left for them to busy themselves with barrack duties. In the Cavalry this is entirely left by the Squadron Leader to his Non-Commissioned Officers.

On the other hand in the *Infantry* the internal arrangements (such as the cleanliness of the rooms, kits, etc.) are superintended by the Lieutenants who at least once or twice each day have some duty in this respect to perform.

There exist no written regulations upon the interior duties to be carried out by Squadrons, Companies or Regiments.

D. Haig.

Captain 7th (Q.O.) Hussars.

## Appendix B

### TACTICAL NOTES

Drawn up by Douglas Haig at Cape Town in November, 1899 (see page 75).

#### *Cavalry.*

These operations have shown clearly the greatly increased power of action possessed by Cavalry, now that it is armed with a good carbine.

1st—On the Offensive.

- (a) During the approach to Elands-laagte, one Squadron 5th Lancers supported by 4 Squadrons Imperial Light Horse acted dismounted, and cleared the ridges on the S. side of the Dundee railway for several miles, driving considerable numbers of Boers in front of them. The Infantry were thus enabled to remain in the train until they had reached a point closer to the enemy's position. They were then detrained in security, marched direct on to the ridge and formed at once for the attack on the enemy's position.
- (b) During the attack on the Boers' position at Elands-laagte, the Imperial Light Horse advanced dismounted in line with the Gordons, and when for a moment there was a check in the advance, it was the I.L.H. who first went forward again. The I.L.H. are essentially Cavalry, being organised as

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such, and trained and led by Cavalry Officers, while there is a considerable proportion of old Cavalry soldiers in the ranks.

### 2nd—On the Defensive.

- (a) On Tuesday, 24th October, the 5th Lancers by occupying a koppie effectively prevented the Boers from outflanking the Gloucesters, who advanced unsupported against the Boer position and lay down waiting for orders or the situation to develop.

All day the Lancers were under fire and held the koppie in advance of the Gloucesters' right flank. Several attempts were made by the Boers to pass in order to outflank the Infantry, but each time they were driven back.

The Lancers remained in their position till ordered to retire about 4 p.m.

- (b) On Monday, 30th October, dismounted Cavalry protected the right and right rear of the Natal Field Force when it advanced to attack the enemy's position, north of Ladysmith on the Newcastle road.

Lombard's Nek and the koppies on the right (or west) bank of Modder Spruit were held by dismounted Cavalry all day against the attacks of the Boers under Lucas Meyer.

Again, the use made by the Boers (notably on the 30th October) of their ponies to carry them to a position or positions from which to deliver a flanking fire upon attacking troops should not pass unnoticed by us, and might sometimes be imitated by our Cavalry with good results in suitable country.

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*Certain points to be attended to in order to improve our Cavalry in dismounted action.*

(1) Pay more attention to this class of work in time of peace. Musketry training and field firing to be made more practical. Tactical schemes for Cavalry in *all* kinds of country; and check Cavalry Officers when in broken ground they sit still and complain that "they can do nothing in this damned country!" (e.g. in Woolmer Forest district!)

(2) It is a question whether the Dragoon-lancer is not a mistake! His lance hampers him.

(3) Means for carrying ammunition.

(a) *from horses to dismounted men.* At present, hats are used and are not very suitable!

(b) *on the line of march.* Situations occur when mules cannot keep up, and cannot retire along with the horses.

Every man should carry 150 rounds on himself and in the wallets. Bandoliers should be universally adopted for the Cavalry. Ammunition should be on *led-horses*, not mules.

Another point affecting Cavalry is *wheeled* transport. The movement of the Cavalry around Ladysmith was hampered by reason of these waggons. It will be noted that towards the end arrangements were made for the Cavalry to carry 3 days' rations on man and horse; and, by leaving off the man's blanket, to carry 2 days' supply of oats for the horse on the saddle. 150 rounds of ammunition were also carried.

*Infantry.*

The mobility of the Boers, and the hilly nature of Natal,

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renders military operations difficult and fatiguing for Infantry.

At Elandslaagte, thanks to the train, but chiefly to the large proportion of mounted troops comprised in the 'Detached Force', the Infantry were able to march with little fatigue and unmolested from the train to the attack of the enemy's position.

On Tuesday, 24th October (Intanyone) and Monday 30th (Lombard's Kop) matters were different. On the latter day the whole Force marched out from Ladysmith to attack the enemy's position. The enemy stuck to his position which was strongly held with guns and trenches; but he used it as a point of manoeuvre, and delivered a counter-attack from the east upon the attacking troops. Then, with some Infantry moved in support of the Cavalry (who were the first to meet the enemy coming from the east), the Boers attacked this body of Infantry from the north, that is on their left flank. The Infantry practically achieved nothing, and were worn out by much marching. At one time, too, the situation seemed critical.

We must conclude then, that for offensive warfare in Natal the offensive power of Infantry is limited. Infantry is essential for the assault on positions which the Boers hold as pivots, but about half of the attacking force should consist of mounted troops in order to secure the flanks of the attacking Infantry column, and to outmanoeuvre the Boers.

On the defensive Infantry are valuable; but the moment they have to move, the Boers have the advantage in Natal.

### *Artillery.*

The effect of Artillery fire is chiefly moral! The teachings of peace manoeuvres and text-books require to be con-

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siderably modified. Briefly, in our Army many have overestimated the power of shrapnel fire.

Our Brigade Division at Elandslaagte certainly drove the Boer gunners temporarily from their 2 guns—2 against 12!—but did not prevent them firing their guns at the very end of the action. And indeed *during* the bombardment the Boers neglected our Artillery, and turned their fire on to some squadrons of ours which were moving down into Elandslaagte village! Prisoners also told us that the shells bursting over their position were terrifying, but “they killed next to no one!” This statement is borne out by the numbers of the enemy who remained to defend the position until shot down by small-arm fire at close ranges.

On 30th October, at Lombard’s Kop, though we had almost 50 guns on the battlefield, not a gun of the enemy was *permanently* silenced. They withdrew their gunners and then, when our guns were turned upon another target, they recommenced firing.

The Boers on the defensive divided their guns with telling effect: for they managed to bring an occasional gun or two up as a surprise, and enfiladed our lines of guns when our gunners seemed least to expect it.

The Boer Artillery fire against columns of Cavalry was wonderfully accurate at times. On the 24th one shell landed between the 3rd and 4th troops of a squadron of I.L.H. when in column of troops—no one was hurt. Other instances of a similar nature occurred, when, according to our *text* books half a troop should have been wiped out. At most a horse or man was wounded.

### *Occupation of a Defensive Position.*

Sufficient attention is not, as a rule, paid in our Army in peace time to *concealing troops* holding a position. Frequently, too, troops seem to be posted too thickly upon a



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defensive position. Men posted at intervals of 2 or 3 yards will suffer less in moral as well as numbers and do much damage to the attacker, provided of course they can shoot. By occupying a position on these lines, there will be more troops available for the counter-stroke.

### *The Attack.*

Ian Hamilton's attacking lines at Elandslaagte seemed, judging by results, well arranged. They were thinner than the normal formation. A Battalion in column of companies, with men extended at intervals of 3 or 4 paces, and the distance of some 50 yards from company to company, seems a very difficult formation to hit.

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